QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES

IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SAKETA K N **DATE**

(Kebede Nemomsa Saketa)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Yenealem Bekele who was very supportive throughout the writing of this work. Thank you very much for your encouragement and always being by my side.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	**Association of African Universities**
ADR	**Academic Development Resource Centre (JU)**
APO	**Academic Program Officer**
AUC	**Admas University College**
AUQA	**Australian Universities Quality Agency**
AQAU	**Administrative Quality Assurance Unit (SMUC)**
AQF	**Australian Qualification Framework**
ASCC	**Academic Standard and Curriculum Committee (SMUC)**
BPR	**Business Process Re-Engineering**
BSC	**Balanced Score Card**
CBE	**Community Based Education**
CEIRQA	**Centre for Education Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance**
CHEA	**Council for Higher Education Accreditation**
COMEDAF	**Conference of Ministers of Education of African Union**
CRDC	**College Research and Development Coordination Office**
CRQ	**Centre for Research and Quality Assurance (SMUC)**
DEST	**Department of Education, Science and Training (Australia)**
DQAT	**Department QA Team (SMUC)**
EFQM	**European Foundation for quality management (QA model)**

ETQA	**Education and Training Quality Assurance**
EQA	**External Quality Assurance**
EUA	**European University Association**
EQUIP	**Education Quality Improvement Program**
FQAU	**Faculty Quality Assessment Unit**
JU	**Jimma University**
HEI	**Higher Education Institution**
HEA	**Higher Education Academy**
HERQA	**Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency**
HESC	**Higher Education Strategic centre**
HEQC	**Higher Education Quality Committee [South Africa]**
HU	**Hawassa University**
INQAAHE	**International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education**
IQA	**Internal Quality Assurance**
IQAC	**Internal Quality Assurance Cell**
ISO	**International organization for standardization**
KIs	**Key informants**
MDGs	**Millennium Development Goals**
MOE	**Ministry of Education (Ethiopia)**
MCEETYA	**Ministerial council on Employment, Education, Training and youth Affairs (Australia)**
NAAC	**National Assessment and Accreditation Council**
OECD	**Organization for Economic Co-operation Development**
QA	**Quality Assurance**

QAO	**Quality Assurance Office**
PSRBs	**Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies in U .K higher Education**
SAQA	**South African Qualifications Authority**
SED	**Self Evaluation Document**
SMUC	**St Mary's University College**
UNSW	**University of New south Wales**
UNESCO	**United Nation Educational, Social and Cultural Organization**
VSO	**Volunteer Service Overseas**

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the current practices of quality assurance systems in Ethiopia at national and institutional levels in the light of government's intended policies and the policies that are being implemented in HEIs. In addition, the study intended to compare the practices of public and private HEIs. It focused on quality assurance in degree-granting public and accredited private higher education institutionsin Ethiopia. For this study, I employed a mixed approach (qualitative as a main and quantitative as a subsidiary approach), combining a comparative case study and a survey to investigate the practices of QA systems in HEIs. Data was gathered from the National QA agency, degree-granting public universities, and accredited private university colleges. In addition, HERQA experts, academic vice presidents, QA directors, research and publication directors, college deans, internal quality reviewers and senior academic staff were involved in the study. Semi-structured interviews with key informants, documentary evidence, and a survey questionnaire form the main evidence base. Content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data respectively.

Although the study found structured QA processes at national and institutional levels, these were very recent in public HEIs, whereas and a quality culture had been developed in private HEIs. Self-evaluation and external quality audits are common methodologies used by both private and public HEIs. In addition, accreditation is another QA mechanism used by national quality assurance agencies to accredit private HEIs. This study confirmed that there was no QA policy at national and institutional levels to direct QA activities at all levels. This had a negative impact on the effective implementation of the system. Standards could be useful because they provide an institution with a clear idea of an 'ideal' end point, something towards which to strive. HEIs should develop their own quality principles and quality indicators for each key area of quality; however, the quality managers of both private and public HEIs did not understand the meaning of quality standards or quality indicators.

There was a significant difference between public and private HEIs in the implementation of internal QA systems and their commitment to implementing them. Private HEIs' top managers were more committed than those of public HEIs. The impact of QA systems on core activities of the institutions also varied from private and public HEIs.

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KEYWORDS

Quality Assurance, External Quality assurance, Internal Quality assurance, Curriculum development, Teaching –learning, Commitment to quality, Impact of Quality Assurance

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CHAPTER 1
ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Quality is the most commonly used term in higher education institutions, yet the notion of quality is disputed and multi-dimensional (UNESCO, 2010: 12). As stated by Barnett (1992: 23), quality revolves around a few central ideas: *quality as absolute, quality as relative, quality as a process,* and *quality as a culture*. Quality as absolute is considered as the highest possible standard. For example, educational institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge and Stanford adhere to this quality standard. Quality as relative suggests that the quality of a product or service can be described in relative terms and can be measured in terms of certain specifications. Quality as a process suggests that in order to achieve quality of a product or service, it must undergo a specified process and conform to the procedural requirements. Thus, quality is the outcome of systems and procedures laid down for the purpose.

Quality assurance is another critical issue to be considered in higher education institutions to ensure the quality of education. Martin and Stella (2007: 85) define quality assurance as a generic term used for all forms of external quality monitoring, evaluation or review. They add that it may be defined as the process of establishing stakeholders, confidence that the provision of education (inputs, processes and outcomes) will fulfil the expectations of stakeholders. Higher education quality assurance practices at the national, regional and international levels have been given an enormous volume of attention since the early 1990s. Originally, quality assurance initiatives were established to assist institutions and individuals in understanding the standards practised in other parts of the same country (Woodhouse, 2004: 54). As a generic term, quality assurance (QA) can mean different things in different national and regional contexts and it is used to denote different practices. The generic operational definition from an international network of quality assurance agencies in higher

education encompasses many different models. As defined by UNESCO (2005: 56) and NAAC (2007: 12).

> *Quality assurance may relate to a program, an institution or the whole higher education system. In each case, quality assurance is all of those attitudes, objects, actions, and procedures, which through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each program. Quality assurance is the responsibility of everyone in an educational institution, though the top management sets the policies and priorities. Thus assuring quality should be a continuous and on-going process. It should not be considered a one-time activity for accreditation alone.*

Higher education institutions in developed countries have long had quality assurance systems and arrangements to improve the quality of their teaching, research and direct community service activities. In recent years, quality assurance has also gained favour in universities in developing countries. Such developments have been motivated by the challenges developing countries universities face, many of which relate to changes that are taking place in the higher education markets the world over, and to which these institutions have to adjust (Mok, K.A, and 2000: 149). Higher education in most developing countries today is characterized by expansion, resource scarcity, increased competition, accountability to more stakeholders, and the growing complexity of knowledge. At the same time, most developing countries have adopted policies that are in favour of mass higher education as a means of redressing past imbalances and providing national economies with the high-level skilled work force required to enhance economic development (Mok , K.A, 2000 : 150).

Due to increased student numbers and diminishing government subsidies, most public universities have been characterized by a reduction in per student expenditure and general spreading of available resources more thinly among various key processes such as student support services, research, library facilities, laboratory equipment and personnel (Lim, 1999: 385). Madden (2007: 78) states: “It is evident that today’s university is confronted by various pressures and tensions resulting from both internal and external pressures. Many scholars have expressed concern about the quality of education provided by universities and the

protection of consumers of that education." There is general concern that new developments such as reduced public funding and rapidly increasing university enrolments may lead to lower academic standards.

In response to the aforementioned challenges and public concerns regarding quality, institutions and governments have emphasized quality assurance policies and arrangements in universities. The importance placed on quality assurance is demonstrated by the move in developed countries towards reputable, internationally recognized higher education quality assurance authorities, for example the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the U.K., the Association of Accrediting Agencies in Canada, the Committee National Evaluation in France, and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council in India (Jonathan, 2000 : 46). In line with these trends in the developed world, African countries have taken steps to establish similar national and regional quality assurance systems in order to ensure international credibility of the programs offered in their universities, thus making their higher education systems competitive on the global market. At its Ninth General Conference in 1997, the Association of African Universities (AAU) recommended that quality assurance should be part of its 1997-2000 programs of activities. To achieve this objective, the Association undertook to assist member universities in setting up national quality assurance systems that would be followed by regional schemes (Jonathan, 2000).

The current status of quality assurance in Africa varies considerably, ranging from countries such as Ghana, Cameroon and Nigeria with a history of quality assurance going back to the establishment of the first higher education institutions, to a large number of countries with no formal national programs of quality assurance. There are about a dozen countries with quality assurance or accreditation processes in place, including Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Kenya (Materu, 2007: 21). Efforts are under way in many African countries to assure quality of higher education, emerging lessons from these efforts could be of value to the Ethiopian higher education provision sector. South Africa, for example, has a national system of accreditation and quality assurance in place. The East African Council on Tertiary Education is establishing a quality assurance system for the sub-region. However, a lot still needs to be done. These efforts, if they are to be successful, must be based on a system for measuring the quality of inputs into the education production function (Kent, 1995: 5).

Quality of higher education and the need for effective quality assurance mechanisms beyond those of institutions themselves are becoming priority themes in national strategies for higher education. This is driven by the importance attached to higher education as an engine for growth and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), on one hand and the emergence of new types of higher education providers on the other (Materu, 2007: xv). At institutional level, increasing demand for accountability from government, other funders and the public coupled with the desire to be comparable with the best domestically and internationally is pushing HEIs to pay more attention to quality assurance systems As pointed out by Materu (2007:25), the emergence of private tertiary higher institutions and the need to regulate their activities appear to have been the main trigger for the establishment of quality assurance agencies in most countries. Several countries have now changed their laws to make accreditation of public institutions mandatory - as of now, national agencies of Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda directly oversee quality assurance in both public *and* private institutions.

A structured quality assurance process in higher education institutions at the national and institutional levels is a very recent phenomenon in most African countries, including Ethiopia. Because of the emergence of private tertiary institutions, the increasing number of public institutions and number of students and the need to regulate their activities appear to have been the main trigger for the establishment of formal QA agencies in most African countries (Martin and Stella, 2007). As indicated by the meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF, 2007: 17), “African higher education institutions and countries do not have comprehensive quality assurance systems. Therefore, developing quality assurance systems at a national level is regarded as a more urgent and greater priority than developing a continental rating system.” What is even more pressing, however, is developing a quality assurance mechanism for African higher education, nationally, institutionally and regionally.

Until the end of the 20th century, the Ethiopian government did not give due attention to higher education. The higher education curriculum was not relevant to the needs of society and current problems. There can be no doubt that one of the predominant concerns about the educational enterprise is the sustenance of quality and relevance. The standard of

education in Ethiopia at all levels was declining greatly and the entire education system was at stake in the early 1990's and before. The performance of university graduates in the work place, as well as their adaptability and leadership abilities, were not as much as expected and should be. Most graduates were good in the theoretical knowledge but poor in skills and in the application of the knowledge they gained from the universities in to the real world of work.

A multidimensional crisis of profound economic impact and social deterioration during the Derg regime (1974-1991) contributed to weaken institutions of higher education in Ethiopia. It has undermined the confidence, which socio-economic patterns had in them and diminished their quality, efficiency and impact on development. Until about a decade ago, the absence of a clear vision of the social and economic importance of higher education, severe resource constraints and settings that provide access to the benefit of the elite only have contributed to the fact that the contribution of higher education to socioeconomic development in our countries has been much less than expected. The universities' contribution to the development of the country, particularly by producing large numbers of the human resources required for development and undertaking relevant and quality research, is not significant. The deepening economic decline, the political situations, and the shifts in priorities caused by war created immense pressure on the Derg regime (1974-1991) to limit or diminish public sector expenditure.

Accordingly, the capacity of the government and its willingness to support the provision and development of education, and in particular higher education, in Ethiopia was severely affected. Above all, there was a lack of a clear direction, vision and commitment for the development of higher education and its curriculum in the country Teshome (2003:15).

Until recently, the tertiary level enrolment was very low (about 1.5% of the age cohort) and one of the lowest in the world (MOE, 2002: 5). However, that situation is changing. The Ethiopian Government is working to re-align its higher education system so that it can contribute more directly to its national strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction (Saint, 2004: 74). There has been a steady increase in the number of students in higher education since 1994 and in 2002 alone; there was a 45% increase (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2002). The average five-year growth in tertiary enrolment was 27%.

Currently, over 200,000 students are enrolled in public universities, while about 70,000 students are enrolled in private HEIs (UNESCO, 2006: 85).

The number of public HEIs has grown from only two universities eight years ago to 22 in 2009/2010. The government has also facilitated and encouraged the establishment of private HEIs. The increase in numbers alone would not satisfy the needs of the country. Higher Education Proclamation 351 (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2003: 21) made provision for the creation of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), and this was established in 2003 (Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003) with the aim of safeguarding and enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in the country. Its mission includes the following: ensuring that accredited HEIs are of an appropriate standard; establishing that the programs of study offered by these HEIs are of an appropriate quality and relevance to the world of work and the development needs of the country, supporting the country's higher education sector in enhancing the quality and relevance of its education provision through visiting the institutions; and developing and disseminating proposals on good institutional practices (Zenawi, 2006: 15)The vision and mission of HERQA is stated thus: *Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency's (HERQA's) vision is to be a nationally and internationally recognized centre of excellence in safeguarding, accreditation and enhancement of standards and quality in higher education. And HERQA's mission is to ensure a high quality and relevant higher education system in Ethiopia. To this end it will assure stockholders that accredited higher education institutions are of an appropriate standards and that the programs of study offered by these HEIs are of an appropriate quality and relevance to the world of work and the development needs of the country (HERQA, 2006: 56*).

One of the major problems of Ethiopian higher education institutions is that quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms are not fully in place in most public and private HEIs. As HERQA, UNESCO and HESC (2006) have indicated, there is no system in place for obtaining data that can be used to judge the quality of an institution or program. Quality assurance systems do not appear in the organizational structures of newly established higher education institutions. It is still rare for higher education institutions to have quality assurance policies and systems. As a result, the quality of education in Ethiopian HEIs is at

risk. The private HEIs are very vulnerable to problems of quality (HERQA, 2006: 56). Even though quality assurance systems exist at national and in some private institutions in Ethiopia, public confidence in higher education has decreased significantly due to heightened concern over skyrocketing costs and questionable learning outcomes. As a result, the value and effectiveness of the quality assurance system has become a problematic issue.

This study investigated the current practices of the quality assurance system in Ethiopian degree-granting HEIs and the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA). It presents an overview of the status of quality assurance practices in HEIs, the commitment of managers in implementing internal QA systems, the impact of QA systems, and the role of the National Quality Assurance Agency in supporting HEIs in Ethiopia. The study focused principally on the practices of quality assurance systems in HEIs. The aim was to contribute to the establishment of the baseline for a quality assurance system in HEIs in Ethiopia and provide information to education policy makers and stakeholders (including employers) and development partners about the need for robust quality assurance mechanisms to maintain the quality of education in HEIs. It would also raise the awareness of HEI top management and teaching staff regarding the procedures and the opportunity of developing and implementing different quality assurance models used internationally.

1.1. MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

It is a widely shared understanding that Ethiopia has survived for many decades with very limited higher learning opportunities. However, more recently, the doors have been wide open for potential learners to get access to educational opportunities at various levels; more universities and colleges have been opened in the last few years. This quantitative rush requires quality checks and controls
through systematic management tools. There is consensus among scholars that establishing a workable QA system serves as an important tool for measuring and maintaining academic excellence in higher learning institutions (Tilaye, 2010: 12).

Recently, both public and private HEIs have rapidly been expanding in numbers and student intake. There are about 31 public universities and more than 60 accredited private colleges and university colleges in the country. The number of students in both public and private higher learning institutions has increased from 43,943 in 1998 to more than 400,000 in 2012

(MOE, 2012). The immediate consequences of increased provision of higher education would be a decline in the signalling effect of higher education because of a fall in the average quality of higher education.

The analysis of all the audit report of HERQA (2008 & 2011) clearly indicated that HEIs are aware of the necessity of assuring quality in the institution. The major problem is that the quality assurance system or mechanism is not fully in place. In most of the audited HEIs there are no systems in place in obtaining data that can be used to judge the quality of the institution .As an instance the audit report for Bahirdar , Awasa and Gonder universities explain that the universities have no plan to establish a quality assurance office , quality assurance doesn't yet appear in the organizational structure. The Quality audit report of Adama university also state that although there are signs that the university is committed to quality assurance , it has no written policy on quality assurance nor as yet any designed committee or unit with a specific and unique responsibility for this function .

In general all the audit reports show that the institutions do not have a comprehensive and robust system for quality assurance that can be demonstrated as operated effectively and consequently.

Furthermore, the quality audit conducted by HERQA indicates that there is a gap between planned outcomes of policy and those expected of the quality assurance system. This raises the question: What at ground level prevented this from being achieved? The reasons that prompted this study of the quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions were, inter alia, the following:

> *Graduates from different institutions who were unfit for the duties attached to their posts and who did not carry out their duties effectively;*
> *Growing complaints by employers that graduates were poorly prepared for the workplace;*
> *Increasing competition in the higher education marketplace as numerous private and public providers enter the scene;*
> *The crucial importance of quality assurance in a global market for higher education; and rapid growth in student numbers in higher education institutions*

accompanied by a substantial decline in higher education quality. (Teshome, 2006; Dinku, 2007; EQUIP, 2005).

From the above it is clear that the quality of education has in fact declined and in such a way that measures have to be taken to develop and improve it. A comprehensive quality assurance system could serve as a basis for maintaining the quality offered in public and private higher education institutions in the country. The above combination of factors provides the rationale for embarking on research concerning quality assurance systems in HEIs. I believe that the study can provide information to the public, HEIs, HERQA and MOE about the status of quality assurance systems of higher institutions and enable them to take remedial action to improve the implementation of such systems.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ethiopia is committed to expanding its higher education system. Since 1992, more than 19 public universities and more than 90 private HEIs have come into being. This is a huge investment on the part of the government and the private higher education institution owners by any standard (Yizengaw, 2007:23). In 2003, the Ethiopian government established the national quality assurance agency (HERQA) by proclamation, with the mandate to assure quality of education and to reduce the negative impact of expansion. Since its establishment in 2003, among the most important work of HERQA has been to conduct external institutional quality audits. Between 2006 and 2008, 190 private HEIs were accredited and HERQA has conducted 18 external quality audits in 11 public and 7 private HEIs. The audit report shows that quality assurance systems are not fully in place in all HEIs and institutions lack comprehensive and robust systems for quality assurance (HERQA, 2006: 26).

Research studies conducted by Zenawi in 2006 and HERQA in 2009 indicated that in some Universities there was no comprehensive and structured quality assurance system; in most audited universities, there was no system in place for obtaining data that could be used to judge the quality of the institution and no written policy on quality assurance. In addition, the stakeholders raised many questions: Is the existing quality assurance system effective in guaranteeing educational quality in higher education institutions? What is the impact of

quality assurance systems on higher education? Is it sufficient in its present form, or is there a need for improvement?

As stated by the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP, 2008: 42), in recent years, public confidence in higher education has decreased significantly due to heightened concerns over the skyrocketing number of higher education enrolments, costs and questionable learning outcomes. The quality of education is growing inversely proportional to the increased expansion of higher-level private and public higher education. As a result, the value and effectiveness of the Ethiopian QA system has come into question. “There is a difference between the planned outcomes of policy and those which emerge through implementation. This means that … any quality assurance system or change initiative will always be impacted upon by “[displacement]” (EQUIP 2008: 33).

This study is a critical analysis of the quality assurance practices in selected private and public universities and university colleges in Ethiopia. It explores how the external and internal quality assurance systems are working, the effects of the system on the quality of education, the commitment of top management to implement the system, and factors influencing quality assurance practices on the ground. The knowledge gained from this study will help build a base of evidence that can be utilized in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the current national and institutional quality assurance systems, and identifying areas where change or improvement may be indicated. The research questions below form the basis of the study.

1.2.1. Research questions

The main question of my thesis is; what are the current status and practices of national and institutional quality assurance systems in Ethiopia? In an attempt to answer the main question of the study, I addressed the following sub-questions

> *What is the nature of internal and external quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions and at national level?*
> *What are the major activities internal quality assurance processes covers in Ethiopian higher education institutions?*

What is the perceived impact of current national and institutional quality assurance systems on teaching and learning, students' assessment, research activities and management systems?

To what extent are top managements of HEIs committed to enhance the implementation of quality assurance systems?

Are there differences between public and private higher education institutions in practising quality assurance systems in their respective institutions?

What are the major factors influencing the effective implementation of internal and external quality assurance systems at national and institutional levels?

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions. The focus was to maintain and raise the quality of education in degree-granting public and private higher education institutions by encouraging policy makers in establishing an effective quality assurance system at national and institutional levels. The specific objectives of the study were to:

Investigate the current implementation of quality assurance systems at national and institutional levels in the light of the government policy;

Examine the relationship between the government's intended performance as articulated in key policy documents and the policies that are being implemented in higher education institutions;

Investigate the commitment of academic and top managers in implementing QA system designed by the government

Scrutinize the major factors that hindered the efficient and effective implementation of QA systems at national and institutional levels;

Investigate the impact of external and internal quality assurance mechanisms on teaching and learning, students' assessment, research and publication, and institutional management.

1.4 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is limited to public universities established before 1998 EC and accredited private university colleges established before 1998.The researcher excluded non-accredited private university colleges, public colleges, and the newly established public universities and newly establish private university colleges in the country. The study included two public universities established before 1998 and accredited private university colleges established before 1998. 2 public and 2 private universities have participated in this study. I focused on external and internal quality assurance practices and explored the various quality assurance practices and structures used by four different degree-granting higher education institutions within the country. In terms of its thematic focus, the study has two distinct dimensions, namely the analysis of national quality assurance system and the evaluation of implementation of internal QA systems in selected public universities and private university colleges. The case study was restricted to undergraduate education offered in JU, HU, SMUC and AUC and does not refer to teaching and learning at post-graduate level or distance education.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In recent years, public confidence in higher education quality has decreased significantly due to an increasing number of private and public HEIs in the country and the absence of a comprehensive quality assurance system (Muche , Shibesh . A & Asegdom A, 2009). It is always difficult for any nation to maintain quality standards in the midst of rapid enrolment expansion, and the Ethiopian higher education system is currently in the midst of a very rapid expansion. Second, the current level of spending per student on academic expenses is quite low from both a regional and an international perspective, varying from US$550 to US$1,158 within the system. Expenditure per student is already very low and is likely to be pushed

lower by rapid expansion Third; the proportion of academic staff with PhD. degrees has been declining and may possibly decline further as rapid enrolment expansion proceeds.

As the tertiary system has expanded, the proportion of academic staff possessing a PhD has declined from 28 per cent in 1995–96 to just 9 per cent in 2002–03. However, the percentage of PhD staff at Addis Ababa University has stayed fairly constant at about one third. But only 4 per cent of academic staff holds PhDs at Debub and Jimma universities, and only 8 per cent at the Gondar College of Medical Science. Mekelle and Bahir Dar universities are in a slightly better condition with 12 per cent of their teaching staff holding doctoral degrees (Ministry of Education 2003). This downward trend will surely impede the government's stated intention of raising the quality of higher education. As noted above, a substantial shortfall in the numbers of academic staff available to support this expansion seems inevitable. More than a year after its creation, the new Quality and Relevance Assurance Agency still exists in name only (MOE, 2003:23).

This study clearly indicates the status of quality assurance systems that are in place in HEIs; to what extent the policy is being implemented; what standards are used to assure quality education; the role of quality assurance in improving quality education in HEIs; the gap between public and private HEIs in implementing the QA system; the commitment of managers in implementing the system; and the major constraints that hindered the effective implementation of the QA system. Dealing with this topic served to address the crucial problems of quality assurance in HEIs of the country. Through this study, I gained a deeper understanding of the actual and perceived effects of quality assurance systems on the quality of education HEIs by tapping into the experiences of the primary players in the higher education delivery system. This study has the following benefits:

It may help concerned bodies towards some insight into the importance of having quality assurance systems to improve quality of education in their institutions.

Findings might help to motivate the universities to assess their achievement /work periodically and take remedial action for their deficiencies.

The study's findings will be a framework to expand and share significant experiences of good practice with other universities and influence policy-

makers to reinforce HEIs for the effective implementation of quality assurance systems.

1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1. The mixed approach

Pragmatism is regarded as the philosophical partner for the mixed-methods approach. It provides a set of assumptions about knowledge and enquiry that underpins the mixed approach and distinguishes it from a purely quantitative approach based on the philosophy of positivism and purely qualitative approaches that are based on the philosophy of interpretivism. Pragmatism focus on the areas of compatibility between quantitative and qualitative research, and between positivism and interpretivism, the mixed-methods approach is an eclectic approach. Creswell & Tashakkori, (2007: 108) notes that

> *A mixed method approach can provide a fuller description and more complete explanation of the phenomenon being studied by providing more than one perspective on it. By encouraging qualitative and quantitative methods and by facilitating a blend of exploratory and explanatory research, the findings are likely to address a wide range of the questions relating to 'why',' how', what' and 'who'.*

Since this study aimed to gain deeper understanding and fuller description of the status and practices of quality assurance systems in Ethiopian HEIs, the interpretive and positivist paradigm of research (mixed approach) was found to be the most appropriate. Data could be obtained through survey questionnaires (quantitative data), interviews and document analysis (qualitative data). Both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered in different phases, but was merged after the separate data collection and analysis of the two approaches. A sequential exploratory strategy was used, namely qualitative data collection and analysis followed by a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis. In this case, the mixing of the two research findings by actually merging the qualitative data with the quantitative data occurred during the discussion of the outcomes of the whole study. In order to triangulate the data from interviews, documents and survey questionnaires, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used.

1.6.2. Research methods

For the investigation of the practices of quality assurance systems in HEIs, I used a descriptive survey research design combined with a comparative case study approach. Four higher education institutions were selected for case study analysis, where a significant volume of data was acquired through interviews and organizational documents. Data on major activities covered in internal QA systems and a factor influencing the implementation of QA systems was obtained from the sample of higher education institutions through the survey questionnaires. The aim of the survey questionnaire was to address some general characteristics of quality assurance implementation and data concerning major activities of quality assurance.

1.6.3. Sample selection

In Ethiopia there were nine previously established (old) public universities and six recently accredited private university colleges. Higher education in Ethiopia comprises many universities with different characteristics, geographic locations, and academic specialization and with different QA systems. Thus the selection of universities and university colleges for this study was based on academic specialization, location and their experiences in the use of QA systems. For this reason, I selected four higher education institutions that suited the requirements of the research design to evaluate and explain the organizational response to governmental expectations in terms of quality assurance. Consequently, two public universities (one university with under-graduate, Masters and PhD programs and one university with only undergraduate and Master's programs) and two accredited private universities (with undergraduate programs) constituted the sample for study. This includes Jimma University, Hawassa University, Admas University College and St Mary's University College, because they have more experience in assurance and accreditation systems than the other universities and university colleges. I used a purposive sampling strategy in selecting the sample universities and the interview participants (information-rich areas) from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the study. This non-probabilistic method of sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research. Purposeful sampling rests on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. In addition, random sampling techniques were used to select sample faculties,

departments, program leaders and senior instructors. The respondents (population) the study were HERQA experts, higher education institution vice presidents, quality assurance directors, faculty deans, program leaders, and senior instructors. Participants of the study were selected based on their knowledge and experience as well as their relevant responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and accreditation.

1.6.4. Instruments of data collection

In a mixed-methods design, as adopted in many social and management studies, the data collection methods and analysis techniques are from both qualitative and quantitative traditions; the collection and analysis proceeds in either a parallel [QUAL +QUAN] and [QUAN +QUAL] or sequential manner [QUAL/QUAN] and [QUAN /QUAL] (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:77). In this study, I used a consequential exploratory strategy to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data collection was followed by the second phase of quantitative data collection. Weight is generally placed on the first phase (qualitative data). The data was collected by means of three data gathering techniques: a semi-structured interview, document analysis and survey questionnaires.

1.6.4.1. Documentary analysis

In qualitative research, the researcher identifies and interprets information contained in the documents, and discovers aspects of the issue in question and the main ideas, statements and thoughts on the subject. Document analysis is a research method applied to written or visual materials for identifying specified characteristics of the material. In this study, it was used to identify the discrepancies between the national framework and institutional quality assurance practices and the implementation of quality assurance systems and accreditation. A number of data sources developed and used by the institutions during the implementation of quality assurance were consulted in the form of documentation, archival items and artefacts. This includes: institutional self-assessment report (SED), external examiners' reports of quality audit, standards and procedures used by HEIs to ensure their quality education, institutional documents (quality manuals, guidelines, strategies, BPR documents, minutes, policies on assessment and teaching methods).

1.6.4.2. Interview

In this study, a semi-structured interview was used as the main data collection instrument. It is a useful way of getting large amounts of data quickly where immediate follow-ups and clarifications are possible. It is common in qualitative research. The main purpose of the interview in qualitative research is to gain access to the experience, feelings and social world of participants (Peter, 2003:94). It could be an in-depth interview in which meaning and understanding are created in an interaction between the researcher and the subjects. An in-depth interview was conducted with HERA experts, HEI academic presidents, directors of quality assurance units, and faculty deans. Interviewing the participants enabled me to get the full range and depth of the information needed for the study.

1.6.4.3. Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire is the favoured tool of many of those engaged in research, questionnaires can be very detailed, covering many subjects and issues. They can be designed and used to collect data in a structured and manageable form. Survey questionnaires can be used to quickly or easily get a large amount of information from individuals in a non-threatening manner. Questionnaires are usually viewed as an objective research tool that can produce generalizable results because of large sample sizes. They can permit a wide range of responses (Creswell, 2009: 102). For this study; an open-ended questionnaire was used, combined with ranking items. I collected a wide range of information from faculty QA coordinators, department heads, and senior instructors of public and private HEIs about the characteristics of the institutions, major quality activities of the institutional QA and factors influencing the implementation of QA systems.

1.7. DATA ANALYSIS

This study utilised the sequential exploratory strategy of mixed-method design to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data. This is a two-phase design in which qualitative data analysis is followed by quantitative data analysis. The rationale for mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches is to seek convergence and corroboration of findings from different methods that study the same phenomenon and seek elaboration, illustration and clarification of the result from one method with results from the other method (Teddlie &Tashakkori, 2009:321). Research design that incorporates aspects of both qualitative and quantitative

methods need not necessarily attach equal weight to both; indeed, there is a strong likelihood that researchers tend to regard one as the ‘main” and the other as ‘subsidiary’ to counterbalance or to check. For this research, qualitative design served as ‘main’ and quantitative design as ‘subsidiary’. Hence, both qualitative (thematic content analysis) and quantitative (descriptive analysis) approaches were used.

1.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Lawrence (1997: 139), direct involvement of field researchers in the social lives of other people raises many ethical dilemmas. There may be no trust between the researcher and society. A researcher has a moral obligation to uphold the confidentiality of data. S/he has to keep information confidential from others in the field. It is the duty of the researcher to build trust and rapport with the participants. S/he should not force people to take part in research but encourage them to volunteer to spend their time on the research project (Marshal, 1998: 321).

In conducting qualitative and quantitative inquiry in an ethical way, researchers need to take care when they ask about private matters and procedures: how they ask it, what they expect interviewees to tell them, and whether and how they can guarantee confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewee. The interview could be taped with the knowledge and permission of the participants. A researcher remains accountable for the ethical quality of the inquiry and should take great care as s/he collects data. Subjects need to enter the research project voluntarily and understand the value of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved. The researcher should protect the subjects from any risk, treat them with respect, and seek their cooperation in the research. Failing to obtain permission to use a site will lead to failure in the study. Such informed consent has to be confirmed by a signature. In this research, I provided participants with information and clarification about the purposes of the study and how I would assure confidentiality of the information they supplied. I also obtained permission from HEIs, HERQA, academic vice-presidents, faculty deans, institutional quality assurance directors, department heads and instructors when I collected the data from each section of these institutions. I kept the information participants provided confidential from others. This was emphasised to the participants prior to the interview to guarantee their privacy. The anonymity of all informants was assured in this study. In this

final report, there are no references to the participants by name; their job description, position or levels of seniority in the management hierarchy were used during data analysis.

1.9. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The central concepts used in this study

Quality assurance: Planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine whether acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced (IIEP, 2010: 9).

Internal quality review: Refers to each institutions or programs mechanism for ensuring that it is fulfilling its own purposes as well as the standards that apply to higher education institutions (Martin & Stella, 2007: 43).

External quality review: Refers to the action of an external body, which may be the national quality assurance agency or another body different from the institution, which assesses its operation or that of its program in order to determine whether it is meeting the standards that have been agreed on (Martin & Stella, 2007: 52).

Benchmark: A standard, a reference point against which the quality of education is measured. They are reference points in a quality assurance framework (Lemaitre, 2005:123).

Quality audit: The process of examining institutional procedures for assuring quality and standards and whether the arrangements are implemented effectively and achieve stated objectives (Vlasceanu, 2009:81).

Standard: Levels of attainment against which performance is measured. Attainment of a standard usually implies a measure of fitness for a defined purpose (AUQA, 2009: 15).

Quality culture: The creation of a high level of internal institutional quality assessment mechanisms and the ongoing implementation of the results (EUA, 2010: 26).

Accreditation: Granting of approval of having met certain standards to operate as an institution (IIEP, 2010: 34).

QA policy: Everything that goes on in an institution or what government chooses to do or not to do in assuring quality (Mahlanga, 2008: 137).

Private University College: University colleges that are not government funded, but have been approved by HERQA/MOE for the provision of university education in Ethiopia and are regularly monitored by the QA agency (MOE, 2003: 33).

Public Universities: Universities that have been established by an act of parliament and which are largely financed by the public funds of the Government (MOE, 2003: 12).

1.10. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter One

The introductory chapter provides background to the study. It presents an overview of the scope of this study, the research questions, as well as the aim of the study as an exploration of quality assurance in undergraduate education at universities and university colleges in Ethiopia. The chapter also highlights the research framework using a case study and survey approach.

Chapter Two

The chapter outlines the literature review and the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework provides an overview of the theories that underpin this study. It also addresses the issue of organisational response to governmental reform from a resource dependency perspective, a neo-institutional perspective, and Allison's decision-making model. In addition, the chapter provides a review of relevant literature. Topics emerging from the review include: (1) main conceptualization of quality and quality assurance; (2) the need for a QA system; (3) external and internal QA systems; (4) models of QA; and (5) international QA practices. The chapter shows how much of the debate has revolved around whether the quality assurance approach is internal or external to the institution and has paid little attention to internal

dynamics in the quality assurance processes, more specifically the power relations that mediate the process.

Chapter Three

The chapter describes the research paradigm and process used in this study. It also explains how the case study and survey study were designed and how the relevant data was collected and analysed around the specific research questions. It deals with the methodological aspects of the study. It outlines the epistemological ground on which the approach to the study was based. It describes and justifies the design that was used, the data collection methods that were employed, and why they were considered appropriate for the study. The chapter shows that the overall design and the methods of collecting data used were the best-suited for this kind of study, which relied primarily on qualitative data.

Chapter Four

Chapter four gives an account of the actual quality assurance practices in the four public and private higher education institutions. It deals mainly with how each institutions assure quality in the following key academic areas: (i) teaching and learning; (ii) programme development and revision; (iii) student assessment; and (iv) research and publication. The chapter argues the gaps exist between the quality guidelines and the actual quality assurance practices on the ground in all the four institutions, and that these gaps also vary from institution to institution. While in two of the public universities there is great dissonance between the written guideline and the actual practices on the ground, quality assurance practices in the two private university colleges is so effectively implemented that the gap between the quality guideline and practice is hardly discernible

Chapter Five

In this chapter, the newly derived themes from a re-categorization of those emerging from all the case studies are discussed. The data drawn from an analysis of content evidence, interview data from key informants and survey questionnaires is reported principally from combined data.

Chapter Six

In chapter six I summarized and synthesized the main findings and discuss the implications derived from the findings. In addition, I propose recommendations for how EQA and IQA systems can contribute to the quality of higher education and how the commitment of academic staff and top managers of the institution decisive to put in to effect the quality guideline designed by the government and institution.

1.11. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided the framework of the study and discussed the concepts of quality and QA in the context of higher education, the current QA system in Africa, and the need for QA mechanisms in higher education. Furthermore, I have stated the research problem as it relate to Ethiopian higher education. A review of literature on quality and QA, QA frameworks, quality standards and international practices in a range of contexts from both developed and developing countries is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on a review of literature and the theoretical framework of the study. The first part reviews literature on quality assurance (QA) practices in higher education institutions. It addresses quality assurance practices generally used in HEIs in different parts of the world, as well as the contextual factors that shape those practices. The idea is to try to establish how well the various higher education systems respond to the needs, demands and peculiarities of their ever-dynamic local contexts while remaining cognizant of the complex demands posed by globalization. Literature was reviewed on international trends in terms of quality assurance policies and practices in university institutions, as well as more generally in Ethiopia. The second part of the chapter explains the theoretical framework for the study of quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions.

The review of literature gave me valuable insights into the main debates and concerns in the area of quality assurance. A prominent trend running through most of the debates is the highly contested nature of both quality and quality assurance in university institutions, in both developing and developed countries. I came to realize that quality assurance is not the responsibility of a university alone; in many ways, it is also a shared responsibility between the academic communities and the increasing number of university stakeholders. This awareness guided my data collection, particularly during interviews with members of the senior academic staff and management of HEIs. This chapter provides the thematic overview of the contemporary quality assurance concepts, namely quality assurance mechanisms, approaches and management strategies, international practices in the broader international context, internationally known QA models, and examines quality assurance systems in the context of Ethiopian higher education institutions.

The second section presents my theoretical framework for this study, which was based on organizational theories such as a resource dependency perspective, neo-institutional theory,

and decision-making processes model to examine quality assurance practices in higher education institutions. These theories enabled me to investigate matters such as how the institutional characteristics matter in policy implementation of quality assurance systems in Ethiopian higher education institutions, the national and institutional managers' commitment, the impact of the QA system on institutional activities, and how the availability of resources has influenced the implementation of effective quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. Themes selected for detailed discussion were: resource dependence theory, neo-institutional theory and decision-making process model.

PART I: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The issue of quality assurance has become the focus of many institutions to enhance quality of education. Quality assurance is a philosophy and a process in which all the functions and activities of an institution should be treated equally, planned, controlled and implemented in a systematic and scientific manner (Maniku, 2008 cited in Venkaiah, 1995: 159). Harvey & Green (1993:13) defines quality assurance as follows: "Quality assurance is broadly the preventing of quality problems through planned and systematic activities, including documentation. These will include the establishment of a good quality management system and the assessment of its adequacy, the audit of the operation of the system, and the review of the system itself.

This definition is supported by Robinson (1995:123), who defines quality assurance as the set of activities that an organization undertakes to ensure that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality, in other words, that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service. Its goal is the anticipation and avoidance of faults or mistakes. It involves setting attainable standards for a process, organizing work so that they are achieved, documenting the procedures required, communicating them to all concerned, and monitoring and reviewing the attainment of standards.

The quality policy of an institution should contain a quality mission statement, resource allocation, norms, quality review and control programs through quality monitoring teams (Maniku , 2008 cited in Venkaiah, 1995: 155). The levels of skills and expertise of staff, the

amount of resources available, weak or strong leadership, and the efficiency of its administrative systems are factors that determine the educational quality (Robinson, 1994:123). Quality assurance practices adopted by any higher education providers should include elements of Total Quality Management, namely staff development, strategic planning, work process, team work, priorities, customers' and performance valuation (Maniku , 2008 cited in Rozhan, 1999; Venkaiah, 1995: 15, 121).

An institution's staffs play an important role in quality assurance. Effective staff development and involvement of staff in planning are important elements of quality assurance. The staff of an institution will be able to analyze their operations and modify them to optimize the use of resources (McIlroy & Walker, 1993: 155). This is important for the continuous quality improvement of an institution. Quality Assurance can be achieved through effective internal management involving effective utilization of human resources, systems, facilities, finance, and the development of a positive corporate culture (Zuhairi & Suparman, 2002: 262). The success of quality assurance in an organization further depends on the total commitment of the management. The quality assurance in an educational institution is possible only when every member of the organization contributes to the quality process.

Even though the notion of quality in higher education institutions is complex and multi-dimensional, for this study the concept of quality is defined as "fitness for purpose", which means that quality is a matter of negotiation between the academic institution and the stakeholders. I can agree with this definition of quality because public and private HEIs have their own aims, goals and objectives. These aims, goals and objectives differ from one institution to another; they are based on the requirements of their stakeholders. Therefore, quality means achieving the aims, goals and objectives of the institution in an effective and an efficient way, assuming that those aims and goals adequately reflect the requirements of all stakeholders.

2.2.1. The rise of the quality assurance movement

According to Kenny (2006) the quality movement can be traced back to the nineteenth century to the Eli Whitney plant in the United States of America, where that company attempted to create a trusted brand by assuring the quality of the product. The quality movement gained prominence in post World War II Japan, where quality-control and quality-

assurance processes were applied in the manufacturing value chain, from the sourcing of raw materials to the final product. As stated by Kenny (2006: 156-157),

> *By the 1950s, quality shifted from the shop floor to the management and organizational components of the business, as it was increasingly seen as a vital driver in the pursuit of competitive advantage and market share. And so began the period of the quality experts or gurus who have cumulatively added to the development of the quality movement and to its body of knowledge. A selection of American and Japanese experts and their contributions to the thinking of quality is briefly highlighted and presented thematically. Arguably, the foremost of these gurus / leaders is W. Edwards Deming, who was largely credited with General Douglas McArthur and Homer Sarasohn as the leading protagonists in Japan's post-war industrial revival and expansion.*

Another major player in the development of quality is Joseph Juran, who developed the quality "trilogy": quality planning, quality control and quality improvement, whereby good quality management requires quality actions to be panned out, improved and controlled. Juran (1989: 85) believes that quality should be emphasized. Furthermore, each person within the organization is a customer and a supplier as that person will be part of a process carrying out some activity. According to Juran poor quality is the result of the failure of the management. He also opined that 85% of the problems in an organization is due to system failure and the remaining 15% due to individuals. In contrast to Deming, Juran proposes a ten-step approach to quality improvement. These steps are:

1. Create awareness of need and opportunity for improvement
2. Set explicit goal for improvement
3. Create an organizational structure to drive the improvement process
4. Provide appropriate training
5. Adopt a project approach to problem solving
6. Identify and report progress
7. Recognize and reinforce success
8. Communicate results
9. Keep records of change

10. Build an annual improvement cycle in to all company process

The third major player in the quality movement was Armand Feigenbaum (2004: 256), who is associated with the development of the concept “total quality control” to indicate that quality is the responsibility of all groups within an organization. In addition, quality maintenance and quality-improvement efforts of the various groups within an organization enable production and service at the most economical levels that will allow full customer satisfaction. (Feigenbaum, 2004: 256) sees it as a business method and proposes a three-step approach to quality.

This brief journey into select few of the so-called quality experts was intended to provide an overview of the development in the thinking on quality. While these concepts have been around for the last six decades, the serious academic discussion in western management literature only began in the 1970s, and higher education followed a decade later. In Srikanthan and Dalrymple’s (2003: 54) view, industry and universities regarded quality management as a means of resolving their respective problems. The main point is to show that the concept of quality evolved in a manufacturing environment and then became applicable in management approaches and later in higher education institutions.

2.2.2. Conceptualization of quality

Any discourse on quality assurance should start by clarifying the terms “quality” and “quality assurance”. Such conceptual clarification is necessary because it enables the readers to understand the focus of the discussion, since different people hold different conceptions of the two terms. This is particularly so with university institutions where there are various stakeholders with different interests, values and expectations regarding quality university education. As Barnett (1992: 12) argues, “University institutions carry out particular social and cultural identities. The debate on quality can therefore be seen as a battle ground where these identities are brought to the surface and pitched against each other”. The way an institution perceives quality is likely to strongly influence the quality assurance policies and strategies it will adopt. As more and more people throughout the world participate in higher education, issues of quality have begun to occupy a more central position. Even more significant has been the change in the way people perceive the quality of university education in general, and the role of a university in

particular. Generally, the key stakeholders in most higher education systems are the state, the market and the academy. These can hardly strike consensus on what purposes university institutions should serve and how they should operate. What really constitutes quality and who should define it are highly contested issues in higher education. Analysis of the quality assurance systems in a given system should start by seeking to understand what it is that is to be assured; therefore, a brief review of the various conceptions prevalent in the literature is necessary in any discourse on the subject of quality assurance (NAAC, 2006; Materu, 2007: 23, 41). Whenever quality in education is mentioned, it may be vital to establish what is understood by the term "quality" because different professionals, such as educators, researchers, and politicians, perceive this term differently. *The Oxford Dictionary* (2003) defines the term "quality" (derived ultimately from the Latin word "qualitas") as the degree of excellence of a thing.

Several authors have also noted that the concept Quality Education is vaguely defined and hence open to different interpretations (COMEDAF cited in (Neave, 1994: 118). This is partly because higher education assumes different forms in different contexts. Along similar lines, Vidovich (2002: 391) describes quality "as ever-changing, to be likened to a chameleon". Martin and Stella (2007: 52) summarize these definitional challenges succinctly when they state that higher education, like any type of education, is a multi-dimensional and complex process, which is based on the relationships between and among teachers and learners. It is difficult to grasp the interaction of inputs and throughputs and the exact determination of outputs.

Many authors indicate that quality in higher education should be viewed as a multi-dimensional concept, embracing all of its functions and activities, teaching and academic programs, equipment, services to the community and academic environment. Internal evaluation and external review conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international experts, are vital for enhancing quality (UNESCO, 2006; and Lemaitre, M.J, 2009). The most comprehensive definition of quality is provided by Harvey and Green 1993, Madden, 2007, Woodhouse, 1999 & Csizmadia, 2006. The authors give the following six conceptualizations of quality: *quality as exceptional (excellence), quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as transformational,* and *quality as enhancement*.

Quality as exceptional (excellence)

The concept of quality as exceptional is traditional, linked to the idea of “excellence” and usually operational zed as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed. King, B (2001:72) identifies “excellence” as a term often defined with reference to institutions.

> The right people go to the right schools and teach the right subjects (to guarantee their excellence and standard). So that the whole institutional make up seems a self evident garden of excellence. In so far as the number of excellent increase, they are accommodated within the establishment of schools, higher education and accreditation; so that excellence and ‘talent’ and ‘quality’ simply mean stock-in-trade off particular of schools…. We must therefore relate whatever people say about abstract concepts in education to the institutional framework they have in mind as exemplifying it, supporting it, and perhaps uniquely offering it. (Harvey and Green, 1993: 3-5)

In this conceptualization, quality is perceived as something distinct, something special that cannot be attained by many. The notion of a centre of excellence in higher education probably derives from this conception. Quality assurance policies for the University of Jimma, and the University of Hawassa, for instance, are underpinned by institutional vision and mission statements that are framed around value for excellence.

Quality as perfection

As perfection, quality relates closely to the notion of “zero defect” commonly employed in industrial settings, where physical products of a production chain have to meet the exact pre-specifications of the desired product, in its perfect form, without any defects. It focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated idea of zero defects and getting thing right first time.

In this conceptualization, quality is judged in terms of the extent to which products/services meet their stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements or, in educational institutions, defined to reflect the institutional mission or course objectives. The

concept stresses the need to meet generally accepted standards such as those defined by an accreditation or quality assurance body, the focus being on the institution or program in fulfilling its objectives and mission. Sometimes quality in this sense is also labelled as: (1) a value for money, owing to the (implicit) focus on how the inputs are effectively and efficiently used by the processes and mechanisms involved, or (2) the value added, when results are evaluated in terms of changes obtained through various educational processes (e.g. teaching and learning processes). From an educational point of view, it seems this definition may be quite problematic, for two major reasons. First, the product of an education process is multi-faceted, usually possessing some unforeseeable and unpredicted but desirable attributes. Second, it is impossible to define a “perfect” or “zero defects” graduate of an educational process. From an epistemological point of view, no knowledge is perfectly adequate, no matter how superior it may be.

Quality as transformation

Quality as transformation connotes pedagogical implications, namely the extent of transformation that occurs in the learners as a consequence of the learning process. Quality in this case is defined in terms of the “value added” in the learner and learner’s assessment and seeks to establish the amount of such value added. This conception sees quality as a process of change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a service for customers but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing the consumer, and empowering the consumer. The amount of value added is not tangible and its quantification is problematic.

Quality as enhancement

Quality as enhancement involves taking deliberate steps to bring about continual improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students. Quality enhancement should also flow from quality assurance by investigating and correcting failures in systems and procedures and by spreading good practice identified in the review of one area of activity and disseminating this to other areas. In this form, quality enhancement is “part of a feedback loop [which], if recognized, noted and acted upon, should lead to

incremental improvement in practice" (Middlehurst,R 1995:258). As indicated in Vroeijenstijn (1995: 55), the application of the Quality Enhancement Framework confirms whether or not academic standards are appropriate, and that the quality of provision is (at least) satisfactory across the HE sector, so a more overt emphasis on quality enhancement (as opposed to quality assurance) is desirable. This conception of quality enhancement focuses on the continuous search for permanent improvement, stressing the responsibility of the higher education institution to make the best use of its institutional autonomy and freedom. Achieving quality is central to the academic ethos and to the idea that academics themselves know best what quality is.

Quality as fitness for purpose and as value for money

Fitness for purpose is generally the quality conception of stakeholders external to the university community, who normally put a heavy premium on the instrumental function of higher education. The market, for instance, looks at the ability of institutions to produce graduates who are immediately functional in the world of work. Graduates have to fit into the workplace without compromising on efficiency and without prejudicing the profit benefits of an enterprise. As indicated in DAAD (2010:15), quality assurance approaches that are informed by rationality external to the educational institution and that regard students as clients, citizens or potential voters subscribe to this understanding of quality as fitness for purpose. This conception of quality is often linked to governments that are concerned about aligning the output of higher education institutions with broad national goals and for using universities as an apparatus to address broader social problems. In this sense, the fitness for purpose concept of quality is closely linked to the concept of value for money; hence, the accountability focuses of the approach to quality assurance. The fitness for purpose definition of quality is a developmental approach to quality, and this aspect is particularly significant to higher education. As customer specifications change with time, so do the aims to be achieved by universities. The assumption here is that the quality of university delivery is not something that is static; rather, it is necessarily dynamic as it is responsive to changes in the work environment.

2.3. A CRITICAL REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE METHODOLOGIES

Literature on the developments in QA points to significant variety in methodologies. This literature also shows a significant degree of borrowing by national systems of higher education from others (Harman, 1998: 347). With respect to QA methodologies, Harman (353) states, Even though the methodologies used in various QA reviews vary considerably, most quality reviews depend on one or a combination of a limited number of key methodologies." This section critically explains some of the common QA methodologies employed in higher education institutions. The key methodologies identified from the literature are: (1) self-study or self-evaluation, (2) peer review, (3) quality assurance, (4) quality audit, (4) student surveys, and (5) accreditation.

2.3.1. Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation (or self-study) refers to the study of institutional processes and practices by members of the respective institution. This practice has proved to be both effective and cost-effective (Harman, 1998: 353). According to Harman, the concept of self-review first emerged in the US in relation to institutional and courses accreditation. However, this methodology has now become an important feature of many QA systems. Harman explains the positive features of self-study as follows:

> *They are cost effective. The main work is done internally; hence, often few additional resources are necessary.*
> *They usually achieve a high degree of ownership since key staff is involved and such involvement increases the chances of substantial improvements being achieved.*
> *The overall process of review or assessment is less threatening when emphasis is placed on self-evaluation.*

Studies indicate that self-study is employed as a methodology in a number of countries, for instance India, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and Turkey (Billing, 2004; Billing & Thomas, 2000; Stella, 2002; Strydom & Strydom, 2004). Self-study is also known to be valuable in combination with other methodologies, for example peer review and audits. The

methodology of self-study and by extension the self-regulatory approach presupposes the notion of the existence of a self-critical academic community among HEIs. This would imply that HEIs can themselves monitor their input, processes and their output. Yet, according to Harvey (1998: 239), it is this very notion of “self-criticism” that makes politicians sceptical, causing them to insist on “hard” statistical data. Self-regulation through self-evaluation is imbued with amateurism and a sense of “playing the game” (Harvey, 1998: 242). In such a context, the game rather than the result may be emphasized. This undermines whatever strength may be attributed to this process. It could prove to be a useful methodology, if the process involves “open dialogue and helpful feedback” (Harvey, 1998: 242). When self-evaluation is made part of a compulsory monitoring process of HEIs where judgments are reached, especially about aspects such a funding, there is “disinclination to be open about weakness and a tendency to overstate strengths” (Harvey, 1998: 237). As Harvey observes, a lack of openness can make the dialogue more difficult and consequently the self-evaluation process becomes a defensive account rather than an opportunity to explore future improvements.

2.3.2. Accreditation

Accreditation (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg & Pârlea, 2007) is the process by which a government or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or a specific educational program in order to formally recognize it as having met certain pre-determined minimum criteria or standards. The result of this process usually awards a status (a yes/no decision) of recognition, sometimes of a license, to operate within a limited time of validity. The process can imply initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by external peers. The accreditation process generally involves three steps with specific activities, namely: 1) a self-evaluation process conducted by the faculty, the administrators and the staff of the institution or academic programmers, resulting in a report that takes as its reference the set of standards and criteria of the accrediting organization; 2) a study visit conducted by a team of peers selected by the accrediting organization which reviews the evidence, visits the premises, and interviews the academic and administrative staff, followed by an assessment report including a recommendation to the commission of the accrediting body; and 3) examination by the commission of the evidence and recommendation on the basis of the

given set of criteria concerning quality and resulting in a final judgment and a formal decision for the institution and other constituencies, if appropriate.

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or program meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the HEI itself (permission to operate) and its students (eligibility for grants). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources and procedures of the HEI or program (UNESCO, 2010 & Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation is a sign of commitment by the institution to continuous development and improvement in the context of the dynamic sphere of higher education. It is more than a onetime procedure that is automatically renewed. Commitment to accreditation sets a tone for the way an institution operates in its financial, organizational and academic affairs (Koenig, 2005: 12). Accreditation is widely used method in quality assurance in many countries. In the United States, accreditation of both programs and institutions is the main quality assurance method. Accreditation of institutions is done on a regular basis by 22% of the agencies in Europe.

According to Koenig, accreditation is now perhaps the most widely used instrument of external quality assurance in HEIs. Accreditation, understood as a formal system of official recognition, and carried out on strictly academic grounds by an independent and authoritative agency, is a very sensible idea. As higher education institutions increase in volume and become more market related, there is probably a growing need to protect degrees (and students) from inadequate provision and “rogue providers”. But must one therefore burden institutions repeatedly with full-scale evaluations in order to perform these tasks? (EUA, 2010: 52) Accreditation is the most widely used method of EQA and has recently been introduced in many higher education systems. It can represent either a transformation of other existing methods of EQA, or an entirely new method. Based on assessment and evaluation, it makes an explicit judgment as to whether a programmer or institution meets particular quality standards that may be either a set of minimum standards, standards of higher quality or excellence, or the institution’s own purposes.

Accreditation against minimum (also called threshold) standards provides assurance of acceptable programs or institutions. When it is also linked to the authorization to operate, it is usually called licensing. Some systems also apply high standards. This makes it possible to

differentiate between those programs or institutions that meet threshold standards (and are thus acceptable) and those whose purpose is to meet the basic standards for the profession or for higher education in general (peace Lenn, 2004: 15).This discussion on the concept of QA shows the difficulties in defining and categorizing processes and procedures. It is particularly difficult when international experiences are considered. This is because existing country realities show a variety of practices that use concepts in a disorderly manner. There is therefore no point in attempting to be conceptually pure. However, there is a definite need to establish a common language for pedagogical reasons.

2.3.3. Quality audit

The process of reviewing an institution or a program is primarily focused on its accountability, and determining if the stated aims and objectives (in terms of curriculum, staff, infrastructure, etc.) are met. In the United Kingdom, when an audit in an institutional process is carried out internally, the process is described (since, 2002:12) as an “institutional review” process. “Institutional Audit/institutional Review is an evidence-based process carried out through review that investigates the procedures and the mechanisms by which an institution ensures its quality assurance and quality enhancement.” When it specifically addresses the final responsibility for the management of quality and standards that rests with an institution as a whole, the process is called an institutional review (Vlăsceanu, Gruenberg, & Pârlea, 2007). Quality audit is the process of quality assessment by which an external body ensures that (1) the institution or program has quality assurance procedures, or (2) that the overall (internal and external) quality assurance procedures of the system are adequate and are actually being carried out. Quality audit looks to the system for achieving good quality and not at the quality itself. Only persons (i.e., quality auditors) who are not directly involved in the areas being audited can conduct a quality audit. Quality audit can be undertaken to meet internal goals (internal audit) or external goals (external audit). The result of the audit must be documented through an audit report.

2.3.4. Peer review

Peer review is a well-established academic process in higher education. In its traditional format, peer review generally involves “a visit by a group of well-regarded academics in a particular field to undertake an assessment” (Harman, 1998: 353). In recent practice, other

experts, such as persons from industry or business, have been included in peer reviews. This is especially the case in reviews of professional programs or disciplines.

Auditing in higher education appears to have its origin in the UK (Massy, 2004: 56). Changes in the regulation of public life, following the election of a conservative government in 1979, posed particular challenges to universities, which until then had enjoyed a high degree of self-confidence in terms of their excellence (Williams, 1992: 23). Quality, standards and accountability became major issues for debate and action. Normally, audits are performed through a series of steps involving self-evaluation and the preparation of a performance portfolio by the auditee, the establishment of the audit panel together with a portfolio meeting, an audit visit by the panel and preparation of the report. In the US tradition, academic program review is essentially “a comprehensive evaluation of a curriculum leading to a degree” (Bogue and Hall 2003). This review will ordinarily involve the acquisition of historic, current and projected data on the program’s purpose, the resources used and needed and an evaluation of performance (Bogue and Hall, 2003). Audits, Harvey (1998: 350) states, in effect check that QA procedures work. Quality audits, as they are called in some countries, for example the UK, do not make any judgment about standards, teaching quality or resources. Their principal task is to audit the system the institution has in place. However, they also provide suggestions of good practice in relation to QA. Australia and New Zealand have followed more or less in the same tradition as Britain and have established academic auditing within their HEIs (Carroll, 2000: 281).

Academic review and audits have some advantages. The process is said to have the ability to identify unnecessary duplication of programs. The study itself can give rise to an opportunity to examine general issues usually unnoticed in the routine management of institutions. Depending on the evaluation panel or committee, the study could produce supportive and helpful dialogue for quality improvement. Audits in the UK opened up, for the first time, the old universities to external scrutiny at an institutional level. Peer reviews are thought not to be good at finding out what is really going on. Peer-review teams mainly make judgments based on what they are told and tend to look for discrepancies in the story. Both program review and audits have been regarded as expensive. Dill (2000: 188) notes, with reference to audits in the UK and other countries, that unlike accreditation or subject

assessments, however, academic audits make no attempt to comprehensively revise an institution's or program's resources and activities nor to directly assess the quality of teaching or learning.

2.3.5. Quality assurance systems

The way in which the term quality is defined and put into practice has effects on attempts to manage or assure it. It is important to understand the different terms commonly used in quality assurance language (Temponi, 2005 and NAAC, 2007). There is no general consensus on the exact meaning of each of these terms. Some of them are generic for the whole field, such as quality assurance and quality management, while others relate to more specific approaches (quality audit and accreditation). Different definitions are used by different countries.

> Quality assurance is a planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced. A tertiary institution is only as good as the quality of its teaching staff. They are the heart of the institution that produces its graduates, its research products, and its service to the institution, community, and nation. (IIPE, 2010; NAAC, 2007; Harman, 2000) .

The above authors further elaborate that quality assurance is an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of higher education systems, institutions or programs. As a regulatory measure, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgments (not ranking) through agreed upon and consistent processes and well-established criteria. Quality assurance refers to the mechanisms and procedures adopted by providers to assure a given quality or a continued improvement of quality. It embodies planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice. It encompasses concepts such as standards, excellence, and value for money, fitness for purpose and meeting stakeholders' needs. Through quality assurance, a provider assures itself and its stakeholders that it consistently reaches the highest standards possible in all aspects of its activities (NAAC, 2007; Madden, 2008; Materu, 2007).

In the context of accountability, quality assurance is used as a mechanism to monitor performance. High standards are being demanded from providers, by learners, graduates, employers and the public at large. Quality assurance is a key tool in the educational process of providers ensuring that they fulfil the demand and needs of society. Quality assurance activities depend on the necessary institutional mechanisms preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. Quality management, quality enhancement, quality control and quality assessment are means through which quality assurance is ensured (IIPE, 2010, Huai, 2005; EUA, 2010). Whatever quality assurance systems are developed depends on an institution's perception of quality education; quality assurance is about putting an institution's notion of quality into action. This requires a clear statement about an institution's quality and a shared understanding of that concept amongst institutional stakeholders such as management, academic staff, students and all service providers. Quality assurance refers to all those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures that, through their existence and use and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are maintained and enhanced in and by each program. Quality assurance extends to making the process and standards known to the educational community and the public at large. The international trend is to make quality assurance explicit and open, as evidenced in the increasing transparency of institutional evaluation procedures and outcomes, and public access to the results of such evaluations. Where it is well implemented and institutionalized, quality assurance permeates every facet of institutional business; it becomes an institutional culture that guides and regulates the activities of new members. An effective quality assurance and control system underpinned by wide participation, effective channels of communication, the collection of acceptable evidence, the acceptance of responsibility by staff and students, and an institutional commitment to staff development and training (IIEP & UNESCO, 2010). For this study, I used the concepts quality assurance, quality audit and quality management interchangeably; they have the same meanings in this study context.

2.3.6. External vs. Internal reviews

A theme in the literature is whether quality could be better addressed by external or internal mechanisms. The arguments cited in the literature supporting and opposing both approaches.

Arguments supporting external reviews and opposing internal reviews

Addressing accountability requires the involvement of an external body. Thune (1996: 36) highlights the potential of external agents in assuring accountability in higher education. The function of independent agencies that undertake external quality assurance activities is usually characterized as providing accountability of higher education institutions to different stakeholders.

External quality monitoring ensures the integrity of higher education, including international integrity, through something similar to an accreditation procedure. The context and the stage of development of higher education sector is a key variable. For instance the development of private HEIs increases the need for institutional accreditation (Harvey 2002: 21).

External quality assurance acts as catalyst for internal improvement within HEIs. According to a range of analysts**,** external support and the provision of cross- institutional data may be useful for higher education institutions in their efforts to self improvement. It is argued that an external quality assurance agency could enhance improvement by being available to HEIs for advice , research and development on request ; having general issue referred to it by accountability and certification agency for investigation ; undertaking research and promulgating of idea on its own initiative and by providing benchmarking data across the sector (Woodhouse 1995 : 111) .

The context of external evaluation contributes for quality improvement by motivating the staff for realizing the self-evaluation. The essential role of self-review in achieving improvement is widely recognized by the authors .However, the preparation of self-review reports involve considerable workload. For this reason HEIs seldom start self –review procedure on their own initiative; they have to be motivated from outside (Rasmussen 1997: 34). Harvey (2002: 30) suggests that this role of catalyst for improvement requires dialogue and advice as

part of the monitoring process and the renewal of a trusting relationship between external quality assurance body and HEIs (Harvey 2002: 35) .

EQA should provide information to various stakeholders, including prospective students, employers and funders. This aspect is particularly important from an accountability point of view. Thune (1996 : 40) suggests that some of the key advantages of external quality assurance are : impartiality , credibility , authority , comprehensiveness , consistency and transparency .

Self-assessment caries the risk of 'write ups . Thune (1996 : 43) distinguishes between full-scale assessments and self-assessment for compliance , referring to the later as ' write up ' and warns against the risk of such practices . It is argued that there is a risk of compliance and of using self –assessment as a political act. It is in the interest of higher education to promote their reputation and image as providers of quality education and research; but in doing so they are reliant on academic departments. The problem lies in the fact that individual departments can 'hijack " the occasion and hold the HEIs to ransom using the self-assessment process to their own advantage , Furthermore , departments can use self-assessment as a vehicle for co-opting assessors to their view points and for developing arguments for more resources .

Harvey (2002: 55) also draws a distinction between self-evaluation for internal use and self –evaluation for external use, especially when external evaluation is linked to accountability requirements. It is argued that ,at worse ' two sets of books ' may be prepared , one for internal consumption and one that is ' embellished for external consumption (Harvey 2002 : 33) .Brennan (1997 : 36) points out that , if self-evaluation is a stage preliminary to a process of some form of external judgment , it is likely to be carried out primarily in order to attempt to influence these external judgments rather than to inform ' self ' . Thus, self evaluation which has external consequences runs the danger of producing compliance on the part of those who are carrying it out.

It is argued that in the case of self-financing institutions, example, business schools, there might be a particularly strong motivation to hide weaknesses in self –review reports. Their purpose might not be to reveal the' truth 'about the quality but to 'stay in business 'by hiding

deficiency and promoting reputation (status). It is reported that in one case for example , ‘ negative aspects ‘ reported in the self-review were used as ‘ evidence against ‘ the institution in published reports and incited the institution to avoid reporting negative aspects in future self-reviews . Furthermore, it is argued that, in self assessment reports departments tend to overvalue their performance. Moreover, the author points out that there are dissentient values and purposes within the departments, thus the concept of ‘self ‘in self – assessment is, in many cases misnomer for the activity.

Arguments supporting internal reviews and opposing external reviews

***Sustainable improvement relies on internal engagement*.** Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995 : 123) argues that “ achieving improvement requires an acknowledgement by providers of a need to improve , an understanding of the appropriate focus off improvement , knowledge of the means of achieving the objectives of improvement and an appreciation of the benefits that will accrue from the effort . In other words, improvement relies up on individual or group engagement with the desire objectives and commitment to their achievement. It is suggested that without intrinsic motivation to improve quality, the best that can be hoped for is compliance with external requirements. “ Compliance may pass for improvement in the short term but as soon as the need to display ‘ improvement’ has passed , old habits are likely to re-emerge Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995:133) . Ask ling (1997: 51) also highlights the essential role of internal process to achieve improvement. It is argued that while internally initiated quality monitoring can be problem-driven and useful as means for improvement , externally initiated process tend to be more accountability-driven and less sensitive to internal needs . Similarly, Knight (2001: 26) warns that reliance on external quality monitoring in unwise and argues that more attention should be paid to internal quality improvement.

However, it is also suggested that an emphasis on internal process does not exclude the use of external process. Harvey (2002: 33) argues that the interaction between both process is essential to ensure that the results of external monitoring are not just temporary adjustments but lead to lasting improvement.

External review inhibits innovation. Harvey (2002: 65) reports that some delegates participating in The End of Quality Seminar suggests that external review inhibits innovation through its conservative or rigid evaluation criteria. In order to ensure effectiveness of quality assurance mechanism s , there is a need for constant reflection and change in external quality assurance , including periodic change in both purpose and in the QAA themselves . The problem is that the quality assurance bureaucracies become established and politicians reluctant to dissolve QAAs as this would appear to be an admission of failure. Hence external quality assurance systems risk becoming 'standardized, which may lead to excessive bureaucratization and inflexibility (Harvey 2002: 66).

External reviews are insufficient in achieving quality improvement. In economic terms the efficiency of external quality assurance system is a little researched topic (Stenaker 2003 : 50-51) However , a review of HEI in England realized by the PA consulting group identified an accumulation of accountability burdens on HEIs , generating costs to the sector . Much of this burden related to external quality monitoring, but sources of unproductive costs included also audit and reporting requirements. Thus the system represents a poor value for money both for HEIs and other stakeholders. stenaker argues that the real cost of quality assurance cannot be quantified, since it includes not only staff , space and operational costs of quality assurance unit ,but also the time devoted by diverse stakeholders to quality assurance activities .

Middlehurst and Woodhouse (19950: 82) argue that fully external quality assurance mechanism are likely to be a costly and inefficient means of achieving lasting quality improvement. Similarly, Harvey (2002: 76) suggests that external quality monitoring implies excessive costs which do not reflect the value gained from the process. In many systems, the periodic and dramaturgical manifestation of external quality assurance fails to engage with or help inform change management in HEIs. It is suggested that the significant resource spent on quality bureaucracies could be better spent on improving internal quality assurance mechanisms.

External review carry the risk of 'game playing 'and 'impression management '

.One of the disadvantages reported by the opponents of the EQA is that it promotes' game playing 'and compliance 'instead of quality improvement. Williams (1997 : 28) point out that one of the dangers of over-elaborate bureaucratic system of external monitoring is that they can lead to a ' compliance culture ' to the detriment of real quality improvement . Newton (2001: 22) highlighted the elitism, favoritism, gamesmanship, and grade inflation. In reporting results from his own research , Newton also warns against the risk of 'ritualism ' and ' tokenism ' in external quality arrangements , with participants primarily engaged in learning the ' rules of the game ' .

2.4. WHY DO WE WORRY ABOUT QUALITY?

As teachers, principals, heads of departments and planners and policy makers in education, you may perhaps have this question in your mind —why worry about quality? It is not just because of the university directive that you should think of quality; rather, quality should be a bottom-up approach and everyone should be conscious of why we should worry about the quality of teaching, programs and institutions. Some of the reasons put forward by Materu & NAAC (2007: 15 & 31) are mentioned below.

1. Competition: we are entering a new regime, where competition among educational institutions for students and funds will be highly significant. With globalization and the GATS (Global Agreement on Trade in Services), the educational environment will be seized by increased competition. In order to survive in such a climate, educational institutions need to worry about their quality.

2. Customer satisfaction: students, parents or sponsoring agencies as customers of the educational institutions are now highly conscious of their right of getting value for their money and time spent. They are now demanding good quality teaching and receiving employable skill sets; thus we should constantly worry about the relevance of our courses and programs to the labour market.

3. Maintaining standards: as educational institutions, we are always concerned about setting and maintaining standards continuously year after year. In order to maintain the standard, we

should consciously make efforts to improve quality of the educational transactions as well as the educational provisions and facilities.

4. Accountability: every institution is accountable to its stakeholders in terms of the funds (public or private) invested in it. Concern for quality will ensure accountability for the funds utilized and inform the stakeholders about taking appropriate decisions. Thus, quality can be considered a monitoring mechanism.

5. Improve employee morale and motivation: The concern of an institution for quality will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities. With a quality system in place, internal processes would be systematic, making every department complement each other's service domain and helping in developing internal customer satisfaction, leading to high morale and motivation.

6. Credibility, prestige and status: if we are concerned about quality, continuously and not only sporadically, it will create credibility with individuals and institution because of consistency and lead to practice, status and brand value.

7. Image and visibility: quality institutions have the capacity to attract better stakeholder support, such as attracting merited students from far and near, increased donations/grants from philanthropists/funding agencies, and higher employer interest for easy placement of graduates.

2.4.1. Principles of developing quality assurance systems

How an institution's quality assurance systems are developed is just as important as the systems themselves. Research has shown that consultative processes promote policy buy-in by implementers within an institution and improve policy implementation. Internal staff should participate in the development of the quality assurance policies they place to improve themselves (IIEP, 2010: 23). Sound quality assurance systems in an educational institution are non-bureaucratic and non-instrumentalist in nature. They are primarily epistemic and aimed at self-improvement. Those who put them in place should be able to appreciate their self-improvement value. It is pointless investing in the development of robust quality assurance policies and systems if they do not improve practices. Studies have shown that in institutions that hired international quality assurance experts or human resource consultants

to develop their quality assurance policies (and institutional strategic plans where the quality assurance thrust is defined), the role of institutional staff has been sidelined, internal ownership has been low and policy implementation has been compromised. In such cases, the quality of the institutional delivery did not improve. This is not to suggest that internal consultants are a bad idea; it simply emphasizes the importance of maximizing the participation of all stakeholders in the process, and also that the development of internally driven quality assurance systems should have a developmental rather than a compliance rationale (UNESCO, 2006; Madden, 2008).

There is often a lack of alignment between quality assurance policies and the mission of an institution. The same can be said of quality assurance policies and institutional budget resource planning in general. An institution's mission finds expression in its quality assurance arrangements. The latter is essential for achieving the former, hence the importance of aligning the two. An institution's quality assurance arrangements cannot be sustained if they are not given priority in the planning processes. I believe that quality assurance should be an integral aspect of institutional planning. The implementation of quality assurance policies should be reviewed regularly and, as pointed out above, the results of such reviews should be used for better planning and more efficient implementation. This is the only way institutions can realize ongoing development and improvement.

Thus, while the policies were sound on paper, in practice many constraints relating to staffing, student numbers, resource availability and, most important, staff motivation remained unaddressed. These pressing factors negatively affected the successful implementation of policy, and worked against quality enhancement in the institution. Explicit quality assurance policies and systems are new developments in developing countries' higher education institutions. Getting everybody on board in terms of quality assurance in an institution is about teamwork and team spirit, which often means changes in the way members of an organization operate. In this context, it is appropriate to view new quality assurance initiatives as innovations within the institution, requiring the adoption of appropriate change strategies for the policy to succeed. According to Rogers, as cited by Uys (2001: 3), innovation diffusion theory provides a general explanation for the manner in which new entities and ideas diffuse through social systems over time. Innovation diffusion

theory is essentially a bottom-up approach to bring about desired changes in an organization.

An important concept of quality assuring educational practice is the notion of “closing the feedback loop”. As a concept, a feedback loop identifies the goals and outcomes of an institution, conducting a self-assessment to collect institutional performance data and having the data feed back to the process of re-formulating the goals. Although this notion is critical in guiding quality assurance, it is inadequate for the ever-improving nature of educational service. Wehlburg, C.M (2007: 2) contends that an assessment spiral is probably more appropriate in the context of higher education institutions. The assessment spiral is a never-ending circle that includes goals and outcomes, measurements and findings, and changes in the curriculum based on those findings. In the assessment spiral, educators must continually monitor and intentionally increase the quality of each assessment cycle. The loop depicts a never-ending process of quality improvement. An institutional policy for quality assurance is essential for all the functions, service areas and level of an institution .An institutional quality management system is a feedback loop of quality policies, procedures and evaluations (Fourie, 2000: 54). Quality assurance policies define the providers’ purpose, set out the standards to be met, and outline procedures on how policies are to be put in place. Regular evaluation determines the extent to which defined procedures are being followed and policy targets are being achieved, and whether policies and procedures are appropriate as time moves on.

As stated by DEST & AUQA, 2006, quality assurance is the nerve system of institutional business; it permeates every aspect and affects everybody in the system. Everybody in an organization is sensitive to and guided by the organization’s quality values and ethos. If a problem arises, the entire system will react, signalling a need for an immediate remedy. A dysfunctional registration system, for example, can derail the entire year’s program for an open school as tutorials may not start on time; learners may not receive their learning materials on time; assignments may not be done, submitted, marked and returned on time; and examinations may not proceed as scheduled. The entire delivery process of an institution is negatively affected and so quality is compromised. Those outside the system may also notice the signs of distress, especially if the problem remains unaddressed. A well-

functioning open schooling system should have self-diagnostic mechanisms that detect quality anomalies early enough to take corrective measures. But the fundamental value of quality assurance lies in its ability to make an institution proactive rather than reactive. It is like a compass that directs the ship (school) towards its destination so that it does not steer off course, wasting time and fuel (resources) in the process.
In well-functioning HEIs all the components work in harmony and everything holds together. As suggested above, the university system is fundamental in developing and implementing a quality assurance system. This diagram is an example of a well-integrated quality assurance system in HEIs (AUQA, and DEST, 2006).

Figure 2.1 an example of a well-integrated quality assurance system in HEIs

Quality assurance means reflecting on an institution's practices to redefine goals, reposition the institution and review strategies to attain existing goals. This self-examination involves asking key questions that clarify an institution's position.

This integrated system started from the mission and goals of the institution, it would have been started from the policy or the quality framework. For an institution to deliver quality

product ,it needs policy and quality assurance framework on quality assurance ,an institutional position statement that defines in explicit terms the standards to be attained by the institution .quality assurance policy is an institutional value position .the policy statement is not only a commitment by the institution to attain defined standards , it also guides and regulates the activities of all stakeholders within the institution .therefore , not top-down approach to policy like the integrated approach but bottom –up policy approach is effective because people implementing quality regard themselves as managerial.

2.4.2. Why is a quality assurance system needed for HEI?

As stated by EUA, cited in Materu (2007: 34), every nation and its tertiary education graduates are competing in an environment shaped by their own local and national needs as well as international expectations and standards. With globalization, the impact of international standards is increasing and public demands for transparency and accountability are on the rise. Educators and policy-makers are therefore challenged to set appropriate standards of their own that draw on and reflect the unique history, needs and expectations of their stakeholders. Furthermore, they are expected to put in place mechanisms to enforce those standards and to monitor the performance of their tertiary education systems to take appropriate and timely measures to adapt to new realities. The main factors that drive the current push to strengthen quality assurance in higher education, especially in Africa, as summarized by Materu & NAAC (2007) are discussed below.

1. Increased demand for tertiary education and private providers

Since the late 1980s, the global market for tertiary education has been growing at an average rate of seven percent per annum. Worldwide, more than 80 million tertiary students pursue their studies with the help of 3.5 million additional people employed in teaching and other related professions. Annual income from tuition fees is estimated to be over $30 billion, increasingly from private sources. In South Korea, for example, 75 percent of tertiary education is privately funded. In Australia, tuition fees contribute more than US $4 billion annually to GDP. Global annual spending on tertiary education amounts to about US $300 billion or one percent of global economic output. Without a robust system to ensure that programs offered are relevant to the socio-economic needs of the society they serve, and HE

system lacks a mechanism to promote and monitor the accountability of HE institutions to their stakeholders.

2. Rapid growth of tertiary enrolment without increased funds

This global trend is most apparent on the African continent: between 1985 and 2002 the number of tertiary students increased by 3.6 times (from 800 hundred thousand to about 3 million), on average by about 15% yearly. This trend was led by Rwanda (55%), followed by Namibia (46%), Uganda (37%) and Tanzania (32%) (Materu, 2007: 77), Because public investment has not been able to keep up this frantic pace, private investment in tertiary education is also on the rise. Out of roughly 300 universities operating today in Sub-Saharan Africa, about one third are privately funded. The majority of these have been established since 2000. Private participation in tertiary education has undoubtedly made a significant contribution for easing the social demand for higher education, accounting for up to 20 percent of enrolment in some countries. However, in many instances there is a perception that the private institutions are profit-driven and therefore the education they offer is inferior to that offered by public higher education institutions. Furthermore, the staffing and facilities in public higher education institutions raise major doubts about the quality of education offered (Materu, 2007: 65).

3. Demand for increased transparency and accountability

An effective quality assurance system promotes transparency and accountability because institutions have to open up to external scrutiny by peers, professional associations and national quality assurance agencies where they exist. A good quality rating by external bodies is also likely to boost students' morale and commitment to their institution, possibly leading to increased readiness to contribute to the cost of their education. The argument for transparency and accountability also assists governments to gain a better understanding of how their resources are being utilised.

4. Increased competition

Tertiary education has become more competitive because of increasing private sector participation, growing demand for accountability, limited public funding for tertiary education,

and the advent of borderless tertiary education. Competition in the developed world is forcing some institutions to seek new markets in developing countries. Some have established satellite campuses, or are partnering with local institutions in developing countries to offer their degree programs in areas that have ready markets, for example business management and information technology. Furthermore, despite the growing trend in international ranking of universities, hardly any African institutions appear among the top five hundred. With students and parents increasingly concerned about quality and ranking when selecting university degree programs (especially where payment of tuition is involved), African higher education institutions are likely to fall further behind if quality does not improve. An effective quality assurance system at institutional and national levels serves to continually monitor new knowledge creation and obliges institutions to regularly update curricula, teaching methods, and learning approachs to ensure that their graduates have knowledge and skills relevant for current and future labour market needs (Materu, 2007: 18). Pressure from private participation has triggered the establishment of national QA agencies.

5. Absence of robust mechanisms to regulate private providers

Some governments began to face problems of educational quality stemming from the rapid growth of private higher education institutions in the 1990s. Problems cited included unlicensed private institutions, unqualified academic staff, sub-standard curricula, and lack of essential facilities. At the same time, call from employers for higher quality of graduates, together with governments' recognition of the need to be competitive internationally and to meet the standards of knowledge societies, have fuelled a recent debate on the need to set national benchmarks linked to world-class standards. As Daniel Ncayiyana (2006: 123) notes "higher education could no longer continue with business as usual. The old collegial model of quality assurance could no longer be relied upon solely to ensure that the public was being well served or that the taxpayers were getting value for money".

Consequently, the higher education community, governments and other stakeholders sought new mechanisms to improve quality in order to halt the perceived decline in the quality of higher education. Because most departments and ministries of higher education had been given or assumed greater power over higher education, it is not surprising that they were the

major force behind the establishment of new quality assurance structures. Over the years, many of them had challenged university autonomy, shown much less deference to the universities and their faculty members than in the past, and insisted on greater control. In addition, some departments and ministries of education had become the focal points of higher education expansion, both to meet the growing demands for access and to benefit from the political patronage that flowed from contracts for construction, equipment, supplies and other needs.

2.5. QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

According to Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003: 72), the early university was submissive to religious dogma and political ideologies, and throughout its history these same ideologies and dogmas where often the source of fundamental confrontation and contestation. Consequently, in order to protect the university from “autocratic exigencies” of the time, the “Humboltdian reform” in Germany in the 1800s enshrined the freedom of teaching and learning (academic freedom) (Du Toit, 2007: 12). While academic freedom thus became the hallmark of the university, the tacit understanding was that it would be accompanied by academic excellence. Therefore, notions of quality and academic freedom became deeply embedded in the core of academic ethos (South Africa, 1997: 128). Consequently, academics became the guardians of quality. The emphasis therefore was on an internal form of quality assurance with the academic responsible for its quality.

Vroeijensteijn (1995: 56) states that while the concept of quality has always been part of academic tradition, the changing relationship between higher education and society has led to its external stakeholders demanding attention to quality. Newton (2000: 156) explains that “changes in society have had a profound impact on higher education in relation to growth and diversity, the size and shape of higher education, mystification, change in funding regimes, pressure for increased efficiency and economies of scale and diverse student population”. In addition to societal changes and demands, national states from the United Kingdom to Australia began taking an overt interest in higher education, especially with regard to demands for increasing accountability by HEIs. Newton (2000: 156) states that from the 1990s, concern for quality in higher education became global, as many countries

established national quality assurance agencies and, according to Bradley (2005: 54), deployed fairly similar methodologies.

Harvey (2006: 32) and Harvey and Newton (2007: 227) indicate that quality in higher education in the United Kingdom over the last decades has evolved around the need for higher education to contribute more effectively to improving the performance of the economy, raising the academic standards and paying continuous attention to the quality of teaching. It would appear that such motivation also holds true for developments in other western countries (Brennan and Shah, 2000: 136). Consequently, the evolution of formal quality management arrangements, including external quality assurance, was in part a result of states wanting to make higher education more responsive to social and economic needs, to widen access and to ensure comparability of provision and procedures within and between institutions, international comparability and accountability for public money. Houston (2008: 62) concludes that the quality imperative in higher education came from the market and from national states. In addition, the politics of quality have been dominated by the macro and micro agendas towards legitimizing changes to the higher education sector, its institutions and their funding focus on value-for-money practices; so reducing the autonomy of HEIs; and questioning the extent to which they produce work-ready graduates.

Now the primary responsibility for preserving and enhancing quality rested with each institution and they needed to be more explicit and transparent in specifying systems for monitoring and controlling quality. In addition, institutions needed to implement a wide range of validating arrangements that demonstrated the extent to which they were able to control their own standards. Furthermore, greater efficiency was to be realized by improvement in institutional management, changes in the management system, and the development and use of performance indicators.

In the last two decades, a number of countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, India, the United Kingdom and South Africa, have introduced external quality assurance (or quality monitoring) of their HEIs. Such quality assurance generally includes the accreditation of institutions and programs, institutional quality audits, national program reviews, and research reviews usually conducted by external statutory or quasi-governmental agencies (South

Africa, 1997:12). The rationale advanced for the introduction of external quality assurance is that it is primarily concerned with quality improvement and enhancement. Furthermore, as the CHE (2004: 37) in South Africa asserts, “it aims to engender/ cause public confidence in higher education’s ability to demonstrate greater responsiveness to societal needs as well as to provide comprehensive information to the public on the manner in which HEIs maintain the quality and the standards of their core business”.

Brennan and Shah (1997: 161) observe that most national quality agencies assume the role of a coordinating body with legal status, but independent from the state and responsible for setting the quality assurance agenda, quality standards and criteria and associated quality instruments. HEIs are expected to conduct an institutional self-evaluation using the aforesaid standards and criteria. The institution is then expected to submit the self-evaluation report with supporting evidence to the quality assurance agency. An external panel of peers (and representatives of the quality assurance agency) validate the self-evaluation via a site visit, staff and students’ interviews, document review and facilities inspection. The external agency then publishes a report that includes commendation, affirmations and recommendations on the status of quality management at the institution. The final act requires the institution to submit a quality improvement plan to the external quality agency.

The external audit process (common to most countries) does not evaluate or assess quality. It focuses rather on institutional quality assurance systems with documentary evidence that demonstrates how such systems observe and report on quality arrangements, and the extent to which such reporting has led to improvements within the institution. By the mid-1990s, self-assessment, supporting documentation, peer-review and a public report were the mainstays of external quality monitoring processes (EUA & AQAA, 2008).

The rapid expansion of higher education, including the growth in the number of providers and learners and diversification in terms of types of providers, learners and programs, has led to growing concern about the quality of higher education provision. The growth of international competition and increased mobility of learners, staff, and graduates have increased the need in the marketplace for national and international equivalence of rewards and curricula and greater levels of transparency (EUA and AQAA: 2000). As stated in EUA (2009: 6-7),

> Commitment to quality assurance implies a commitment to continuous improvement. It involves three basic activities - setting goals and standards, evaluating practice against
> these standards and improving practices. External verification of the quality assurance policy and procedures of providers is necessary to provide some degree of accountability and transparency.

Quality is a notion that has accompanied university education for a considerable time. Focus on it has recently accelerated, particularly in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. In recent years, the quality discourse has moved from one promoting and encouraging quality through grants to universities for innovations and investigations to one of assuring quality through institutional bench marking and audits by external bodies. Most recently, a number of countries have established national agencies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK (QAA), the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and New Zealand University Academic Audit unit (NZUAAU). An international umbrella organization for these agencies, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), has also been established. Through the work of these agencies, universities shape their activities and report upon them in order to demonstrate that they have quality assurance processes in place (Kasaye, 2005: 113).

What are the components of an effective quality assurance system? Possibly, as summarized by the HEQC (1994: 32), an effective quality assurance system:

> Has a clear specification of roles, responsibilities and procedures;
> Enables institutional aims and objectives to be achieved;
> Informs decision making;
> Is free from individual bias;
> Is repeatable over time;
> Involves all staff;
> Includes the specification of standards and acceptable evidence;
> Prompts continuous improvement

In a similar way, the development of a “quality culture” (HEQC, 1994: 87) to underpin a successful quality system requires:

> An open and active commitment to quality at all levels;
> A willingness to engage in self-evaluation;
> A firm regulatory framework; clarity and consistency of procedures;
> Explicit responsibilities for quality control and quality assurance;
> An emphasis on obtaining feedback, from a range of constituencies;
> A clear commitment to identifying and disseminating good practice;
> Prompt, appropriate, and sensitive managerial action to redress problems, supported by adequate information

2.5.1. Quality assurance policy in higher education

For an institution to deliver a quality education, it needs a policy on quality assurance. Du Vivier, Ellis & Tumadóttir (2009) describe quality policy as

> An institutional position statement that defines in explicit terms the standards to be attained by the institution (what), the methodology / approaches to be used (how) and the parties responsible (who).A quality assurance policy is an institutional value position: it is commitment to excellence that is demonstrable, defendable, and externally verifiable; “ideally” the statement (value) is mirrored in the mission of the institution and aligns with the national policy position. The policy statement is not only commitment by the institution to attain defined standards; it also guides and regulates the activities of all stakeholders within the institution.

It directs the various efforts and energies of institutional stakeholders towards a common purpose, and it guides institutional planning efforts, including the allocation of resources. If there is no such policy, institutional activities are not harmonized and people do not feel obliged to do certain things. The authors further mention that policy is a way to ensure that the right things are done. A lack of policy suggests a lack of commitment on the part of management (Du Vivier, Ellis & Tumadóttir (2009).

There should be a shared understanding of the policy within the institution, so it should be developed with some degree of consultation. Sound quality assurance policy has frequently failed to take effect simply because of the manner in which it was developed. Generally, top-down approaches to policy developments are not effective because the people implementing them regard them as managerial rather than self-improvement instruments. Equally bad are overly complicated quality assurance policies that are difficult to interpret and implement; they do not provide the guidance they are meant to provide (Tumadóttir, 2009: 124).

The quality assurance policy should provide a framework for and drive the quality assurance procedures. The quality assurance policy should reflect the provider's mission and values and relate closely to the relevant strategic management plans and operation. It should clearly set measurable quality objectives, at various functions and levels within the organization. The procedure should provide opportunity for analysis and development of the mission statement, values and plans (EUA, 2009; Kettunen, 2008).

The quality assurance policy should cover all relevant aspects of the provider's functions and operations that influence the standard and quality of its higher education and training programs. Responsibility for the formulation of quality assurance policy and for maintaining and improving institutional quality typically rests with the governing body of the providers Should the governing body delegate responsibility for the design and implementation of the quality assurance policy and procedures, the body or person to whom responsibility for implementation is delegated, must be clearly identified. That body or person reports directly to the governing body on quality matters, and should be at an appropriate level in the structure of the organization of quality assurance policy and procedures. The quality assurance policy should provide for the involvement of external experts in the review of quality assurance policies and procedures (EUA, 2009; Kettunen, 2008).

2.5.2. Departmental administrators (DAs) and quality assurance

Many universities have dedicated quality offices within central administration to ensure that the enhancement of quality takes place throughout the institution rather than within isolated, disparate pockets of good practice. However, students' learning needs are mostly at stake on a departmental level. I describe here how a departmental administrator (DA) can work

creatively with central quality office staff and external institutions to ensure that students receive enhanced quality learning experience throughout their studies. In the British university system, the DA of an academic department is its highest administrative managers, and their tasks are manifold. These include supervision of administration, staff management, financial management, time-tabling and workload issues, advertising, external relations, contracts and remuneration of visiting tutors, and notably, quality assurance functions, since most departments do not employ a dedicated departmental quality officer (Kirkpatrick .D ,2005: 26).

I here draw attention to the special contribution to departmental quality assurance that a departmental administrator can make. The DA's quality assurance duties include making sure that the departmental program and course specification are complete, up to date, and fit for purpose. The tasks encompass collaborating with academic and central administration staff on individual student cases, for instance on complaints, appeals and matters of academic misconduct. The responsibilities also include ensuring that all students re-taking examinations get equitable opportunities. Furthermore, the department must operate according to the law and all relevant regulations. The DA should communicate with other departments to share best practice in quality assurance and liaise with the external bodies related to quality assurance, validation and accreditation (Wolf, 2002: 81).

A quality conscious DA can support and enhance the quality policies agreed upon at central or university level and can ensure that quality assurance issues are dealt with speedily and creatively, close to the student customer. Through the work of the DA, the needs of the department and the diverse requirements of students can be taken into account proactively whilst adhering to university-wide and nation-wide guidelines. Importantly, the DA can easily be in touch with the students and involve them in decision-making, for instance through committees or focus groups. In short, the DA can take the role of an efficient creative coordinator, actively facilitating discussion between the department, the institution and external quality assurance agencies and accreditation bodies. In fact, I urge those entire departments who do not have such a managerial role – who rely on just a secretary to take care of lower-level administration, whilst the responsibility for major administrative processes lies on the shoulders of the central university administration and also perhaps departmental

academic staff, to consider creating a DA's post. I maintain that it is better to have a professional overseeing administrative management matters such as quality issues on departmental level, supporting and enhancing the work of central university quality assurance specialists.

Once again, the DAs are established to campaign for the successful department-level implementation of decisions taken centrally, and to promote quality at every step. They work with academic staff to ensure that the diverse study-related needs of the learners can be met by the department as completely as possible. To support the students directly, DAs can also open their offices to students during designated hours, work with student representatives, and organize student/staff forum meetings where feedback is given and received. The department's quality-related policy and procedures may focus on issues such as the creative use of a virtual learning environment. There may be a departmental peer review policy, committee guidelines, an external examiners policy, and the standards to which the departmental office staff need to adhere as they assist the students with study-related enquires (Smith, 2005: 21).

2.5.3. Departmental quality assurance policy and specific actions

According to EUA, (2009: 21-23), the departmental quality-related policies and procedures may focus on issues such as the creative use of "Virtual Learning Environments". There may be a departmental peer review policy; committee guidelines; an external examiner policy; and standards to which the departmental office staff need to adhere as they assist students with study-related enquiries. Quality management procedures (such as the office procedures related to the anonymous submission and processing of coursework) can also aid the impartial assessment of students by academic staff. These measures help to promote a smooth path for the students to obtain the best degree results possible.

Today's reality also includes various surveys, ranking lists and league tables of higher education institutions made by organizations ranging from national agencies to newspapers, and documentary evidence of an institution's quality procedures and standards may be crucial for its success in those types of assessment. At present, external examining policies are probably amongst the most topical quality related policies in the UK, but even such

matters as the opening hours of the departmental office may have crucial significance for the quality of the students' learning experience (EUA & AQAA, 2008).

Furthermore, quality management tasks undertaken by the DA can help the department's self-reflection and self-evaluation, audits, accreditation processes and the ongoing effective development of the study programs in general. A departmental administrator who notices, say, that peer reviews are not being carried out should certainly bring the matter to the attention of the head of department. Academics and administrators also need other clear documentation dealing with standards, quality and the students' academic well-being. The systematic management of academic quality enables, and requires, full documentation of study aims, learning outcomes, materials, methods and assessment criteria.

Although the head of department has ultimate overall responsibility for his or her unit, the DA has several delegated responsibilities in the area of academic programs' quality assurance. Ensuring academic quality requires constant vigilance as well as excellent communication and influencing skills, sometimes even diplomacy, tact, and academic credibility on the part of the DA. It is often up to the DA to make sure that particular course specification or quality policies are promptly updated, and that they are also adhered to by all members of staff, even though all parties concerned are busy. Information on departmental policies and news on specification changes can be published in the academic staff handbook and newsletters of the department, which can be edited by the DA quality cycle (EUA & AQAA, 2008: 21-22, 125).

As universities adapt to changing external circumstances within the "knowledge society" (Wolf, 2002: 46-47; Hargreaves, 2003: xvi), it may not be best to determine quality simply by using "objective" external measures such as those provided by national quality assurance agencies or newspaper league tables. Admittedly, it is perhaps impossible for universities totally to eschew rankings and comparisons. But to achieve lasting results that are useful for the institution in question, it is important that the university adopt a tailor-made developmental approach to its quality control, assurance and enhancement processes. Such internal quality management processes focus on planning and program delivery as well as on the quality of learning and student experience. The tailor-made, non-comparative internal quality processes recognize the individual, diverse goals of the institution and its

departments. They also assist the institution in paying attention to its strengths and to improving the quality of learning through a continuous cycle of reflection, self-correction, and advancement and achievement. The processes can include the analysis of feedback sheets and staff-student committee minutes; organization of focus group meetings involving students and conducting peer reviews

2.6. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

What is meant by a “quality framework”? To answer this question, it is first necessary to define the term quality itself. This thesis uses the most common definition, namely “fitness for purpose (FFP)”. In terms of this definition, achieving quality requires a cyclical approach: actions lead to results that are compared with the initially stated purpose. These cycles are often called “quality loops” and consistently achieving quality requires a systematic approach to implementing the quality loops (AUQA, 2008: 13).

Over the last 50 years, there have been many attempts to devise structures that will help organizations achieve high quality by arranging their quality assurance activities to facilitate assessment and improvement. The best known of these are the ISO: 2000 series of standards, Total Quality Management (TQM), quality awards (most notably the US Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and in Australia the Australian Business Excellence Framework); and more recently the Balanced Scorecard. They have common features and approaches but different emphases. None of these was developed specifically for educational institutions, although such organizations can benefit from well-judged use of some of the approaches and concepts. Baldrige and ISO: 9000 have been adapted to specific areas, such as education and other service activities. However, this variant calls into question the intended comprehensive nature of the respective structures; also, it is possible that the system could become too complex (AUQA, 2007 & CHE, 2006). These quality structures are often called a “quality framework”. This thesis proposes a way of thinking about quality frameworks while acknowledging that the term is often used very loosely. As summarized by AUQA (2007:13), David (2006: 34) and Jeanette (2006: 43), a quality framework comprises the following major elements: specification of scope (teaching, research, governance, staff support etc); specification of the coherent inter-relation of these factors; for each factor in the scope, a specification of the nature and implementation of the

quality-loops (method); principles / process. The Baldrige and ISO: 9000 probably satisfy this definition in full. The Research Quality Framework (RQF) and the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) consist primarily of a scope plus outcome indictors in the scope areas.

A quality management system is a systematic approach to managing quality in a specific organization. It comprises: a statement of the organization's approach to managing for quality; scope for each factor in the scope; a specification of the structures and procedures intended to achieve quality (e.g. details about terms of reference, reporting lines for all committees, responsibilities, and personnel); specification of overarching coordination of these structures. It follows that a quality assurance system is a set of related or interacting ideas, processes or components for the achievement of quality. Thus it includes QMSs and QFs, both institutional and sectoral. At a sectoral level, it may be called a "quality assurance system" (Deakin University, 2006: 89).

It is important to remember that quality frameworks are not intended as straitjackets. Organizations consist of people and therefore are complex and inconsistent, whereas a quality framework provides a coherent and consistent way of thinking about the organization. Whatever framework is chosen, therefore, it is unlikely that everything will fit neatly into it. It is easy to draw boxes but not easy to fit people into them. The quality framework should be used to guide the thinking and acting and planning, but if some aspects of the system fall outside the requirements of the framework for good reason, this should be accepted (DEST, ISO & UNSW, 2006). In my view, the quality assurance model shown in Figure 2.2 can serve as the best quality assurance framework to maintain the quality of higher education institutions. This model has five central components, including governance through the university senate and academic board; effective management by strategic performance objectives and indicators; critical self-review involving analysis and measurement; identification of achievements and strengths; and the development of plans for improvement and implementation. The quality assurance model indicates that the continuous cycle of reviews engages academic and general staff, and provides support and recognition for achievement. The initial step in evaluating quality outcomes is to compare these to the original specification to see if a relationship is observed between goals, process and

outcomes. As with all successful transformations, the academic vice president together with the senior executive and the deans should provide unambiguous leadership of the quality movement from its inception (AUQA, 2010: 152).

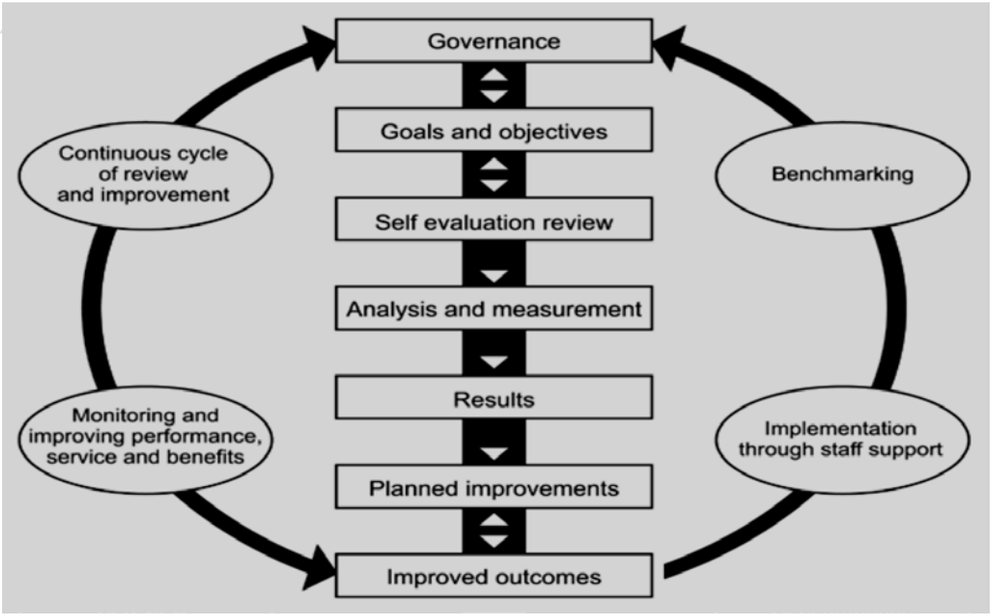


Figure 2.2 Higher education institution quality assurance model/ framework (Source AUQA, 2010)

The task of the institutional quality assurance unit (IQAU) is to coordinate the university's quality assurance and improvement processes, reinforce its quality management systems and ensure that its quality assurance processes are aligned with the principles articulated above, as well as monitoring outcomes, IQAU advises the academic vice-president on both academic and management processes to implement the quality assurance strategy. It reviews the strategy and ensures that internal processes are coherent with external reporting and audit requirements, using standards appropriate to research-intensive universities internationally. The IQAU is chaired by the Vice-president for Academic Affairs and its membership consists of senior officers, the Chair of the Academic Board and senior representatives of administrative and academic areas. The Academic Board provides a significant parallel approach concerning the coordination of the reviews of faculties (AUQA, 2007: 47).

SCOPE OF A QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The Baldrige National Quality Program (2009: 223); as well as AUQA, 2007: 14-16) identifies seven factors that cover the “sweep of organizational activities”. An analogous set of factors that cover the scope of higher education might look as follows:

1. ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Organizational overview

Governance

Management system

Strategic planning and review

Policy management

Quality management system (QMS)

2. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Education strategy

Program design, monitoring and revision

Teaching, assessment

Learning

Delivery and distance delivery

3. RESEARCH

Research strategy and management

Coordination, support and evaluation of research

Commercialization

Postgraduate student management and training

Research–teaching nexus

4. OTHER CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY/ COMMUNITY SERVICE

Good citizenship

Professional work

Administration /management

Community service

Application of research

Indigenous and international links

5. STAFFING

Staff management system and staff support service

Staff planning, appointment, mentoring, appraisal, development

6. ENABLING SERVICE

Knowing students, student management system and student support

Financial management

Marketing, public relations

7. FACILITIES

Library, information technology service, information systems

Physical resource management

Physical facilities, laboratory provision

One could argue that a “scope” should be homogenous or on the same level; however, items 2, 3 and 4 are the activities for which the organization exists, while the purpose of the other items is to support activities embedded within the quality framework.

2.7. QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN ETHIOPIA HEIS

Ethiopia started introducing modern education in the 1940s. As pointed out in Forum for Social Studies (2009: 71), the transition of higher education in Ethiopia has gone through three major changes since the early 1950s:

> *The first is the phase of an elite education system where quality over a number of years was the guiding norm under the traditional monarchy. The second phase was when the country fell under the military rule where shallow ideological control penetrated the education system. The third phase is the ethnic federal arrangement where the country seems to be facing a dramatic expansion of higher education with all the problems that this has brought to the decline in maintaining high quality in the curriculum, the graduates and the overall educational standards.*

Until the final decade of the 20th century, higher education in Ethiopia was not given due attention, curriculums were not always relevant to the country’s problems, while graduate production capacity was not in line with the country’s need for trained individuals (MOE, 2002: 13). Since then, actions have been taken to change that situation. “Government has realigned the higher education system, so that it can contribute more directly to its national strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction” (Saint, 2004: 83). Both public and private higher education institutions have grown since 1991. Ethiopia is committed to expanding its higher education system. Since 1992 (and a new education and training policy) more than 30 public universities and more than 60 private higher education institutions have come into being. This is a huge investment on the part of government and private higher education institution owners by any standard (Saint, 2004: 43-84). There has been a steady increase in the number of HEIs and students in higher education. Between1994 and 2002 alone there was a 45% increase, on average the total number of students were growing at 15% per annum (MOE, 2002: 2). Through two national education sector development programs (ESDP I and II) the growth in higher education particularly in the public sector has

been the highest of the annual average increase of over 33% per year (MOE, 2O07: 15). The number of public higher education institutions has also grown from only two universities eight years ago to 22 by 2009 and 31 by 2012.

As noted by Yizengaw and MOE (2003: 18), expansion without the necessary and planned intervention could easily compromise quality. Public universities are expected to be 31 in number this year. Enrolment at higher education institutions has also expanded with a policy of 70: 30, with 70% catering for science and technology students and 30% for humanities and social sciences. Sensitive to the fact that expansion of numbers alone would not satisfy the needs of the country, the government and employers expect an education system that fulfils fitness for purpose, in other words, a system that produces graduates that meet the needs of the country's industries and services. Graduates should not only match the vacancies that business and organizations wish to fill but also have the necessary skills that will enable them to work effectively in a modern and more dynamic manner.

It is well known from the literature that one of the primary purposes of higher education is to provide a signal of the productivity of workers in the labour market. This effect is likely to diminish if there are many public and private higher education providers and there is no effective quality assurance mechanism. Under such circumstances, a degree from any university could mean anything in terms of quality. A consequence of a breakdown of the signalling of the effects of higher education can be quite serious and it is for this reason that many governments in Africa, including Ethiopia's, are careful about operators. Private higher education institutions, especially of the family-owned variety, are very vulnerable to the quality problem because to survive, they must have lower production costs (UNESCO & World Bank, 2004: 151).

The quantity vs. quality paradox in the expansion of higher education is a crucial issue in Ethiopia. The fact that the quality of education is growing inversely proportional to the increased expansion of higher-level public and private education is also recognized by the government of Ethiopia. The Ministry of Education compliments the government for widening access and redressing injustices, but also notes that there are still weaknesses in quality of education, the instruction, the preparation of the students, the examination and management (Mamo, 2009: 15). According to a study conducted by the Forum for Social Studies (

Asegidom, Meshesha & Muche ,2009), some of the problems that continue to plague the education system in Ethiopian higher education institutions are, inter alia, the following:

> High enrolment not matched by existing capacity, resulting in negative quality of education.
> Staff qualification profile in higher education is woefully inadequate. Fifty-two percent of the teachers (in higher education) hold diplomas and bachelor degrees while the Ministry of Education's benchmark is 20% for first degree holders.
> The proportion of current PhD holders is about 9%, while the recommended minimum is 30%.
> The qualification profile of the academic staff in the 12 new universities is much worse.
> Enrolment expansion at the expense of declining resource allocation per student
> Pedagogic creativity is very limited in lecturers' abstract subjects.
> Difficulty in creating strong and consistent assessment schemes
> Imposing accreditation schemes for private universities while exempting public ones

Several studies (Pankhurst, 1999, 2001; UNESCO, 2004; World Bank, 2005 and Damtewu Tefera 2005, 2007) have shown that Ethiopian education expansion is characterised by the prevalence of poor quality across education sectors from primary to higher education Studies by Teshome (2009: 12-13) also confirm the further deterioration of outputs from the educational system of Ethiopia. The signs of deterioration of the quality of higher education in Ethiopia are already evident in the skills deficit of recent graduates and employers' dissatisfaction, the low level in quality of research carried out by staff in higher education institutions, the shortage of resources and undue increase in the workload of teaching personnel (Teshome, 2009: 8). To minimize this quality problem, the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) was established in 2003 by proclamation with a mandate to assure quality and reduce the negative impact of expansion. The agency has now grown into a nationally recognized organization safeguarding and enhancing quality and relevance in Ethiopian higher education. In undertaking these roles, HERQA has faced many challenges, but by putting quality higher education on the agenda, and by engaging with institutions through its quality audit, it has contributed significantly to enhancing the quality of higher education (HERA, 2008; Tesfaye, 2009). Its mission is to ensure that accredited HEIs

are of an appropriate quality and relevance to the world of work and the development needs of the country and that the country's higher education sector is supported in enhancing the quality and relevance of its education provision (FDRE, 2003:23). In addition, the education proclamation (351/2003) set up a Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) to guide and oversee the education sector.

The way that the concept of quality assurance has been introduced and developed in Ethiopia has been strongly influenced by various "travelling salesmen" who drew on their own (northern) university sector experience and conceptual frameworks to advise the sector and government. The main sources of northern influence were the World Bank, which was offering advice and low-cost funding; the UK, through Voluntary Service Overseas, which placed experienced UK academics in senior positions in the newly created HERQA and the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC), and the Dutch, through the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) projects that were mainly run through Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, to develop pedagogy and strategic capability within HERQA. Quality assurance as a travelling concept has proved to be "leaky and malleable" as it has moved to Ethiopia (Ashcroft & Rayner, 2011: 22).

The system now includes transparent quality assurance, with monitoring for accreditation purposes (especially important in regulating the expanding private sector) and institutional audit. The result has challenged the operation of power within government and devolved considerable freedoms and responsibilities to the universities. HERQA, a quasi-autonomous sector support unit, operates a relatively "hands-off" system of regulation and control (Ashcroft & Raynerner, 2011: 5, 23). The authors further point out that the focus on quality in Ethiopia also encompasses relevance, especially practical problem-solving skills and student and community orientation. Relevance requires improvements to teaching and research, greater responsiveness to the labour market and careful curricula review in terms of relevance to Ethiopia's needs. It encompasses active learning and practical education and training for almost all students and disciplines, and more student involvement in matters such as evaluation and governance. Ethiopia's system for quality assurance in higher education has developed a settled conceptual and philosophical framework. There is general consensus about its essential features. These are that

Institutions' autonomy should be respected;

HERQA's role is to look for and value local innovation and then disseminate results;

The higher education institution takes responsibility for designing good quality processes and outcomes, rather than HERQA prescribing a set of inputs;

The institution's mission and objectives are the starting point for assessment;

The system assumes that most of the innovatory ideas and improvements in quality systems will come from institutions rather than HERQA;

HERQA's job is not to control, but to recognize and disseminate good practice;

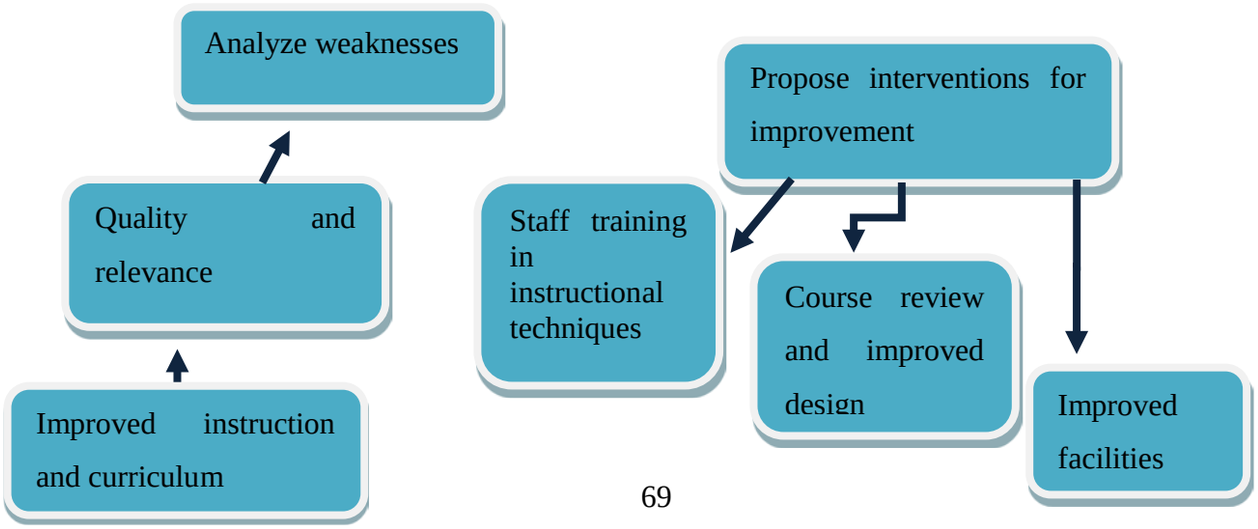
Institutional self-assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses is expected to lead institutions to seek and implement improvements;

The system relies on skills of self-assessment that generally require some training is supplied regularly by HERQA;

Higher education institutions trust that they will get a better report where they are.

The Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) is one of several Dutch projects helping develop higher education in Ethiopia. Over a four-year period (2005 -2008), its aim is to set up Academic Development and Resource Centres (ADRCs) at nine public universities. In design, the ADRCs are central to the quality improvement cycle sometimes termed as a “quality care” cycle.

Figure 2.3 Quality Care Cycle



Ethiopian quality care (2005)

The cycle starts with quality and relevance assessment. Quality and relevance education creates graduates whose training matches the needs of their chosen careers, the demands in the world of work and the national priorities. Concurrent with the EQUIP project has been the creation of a national higher education relevance and quality agency which was started to carry out external audits in the public universities. In the absence of quality assurance and management systems, the universities have given the ADRCs quality care units that play a major role in conducting internal audits and the creation of self-evaluation documents as a prelude to the all important external audits.

Both the HERQA and EQUIP projects are trying to remedy the situation by helping universities to set up a robust quality management system. Quality assurance should lie with the departments, faculties and senate themselves and a separate quality unit should be established for audits and liaison with the external agency. Until such time, the ADRCs will endeavour to provide advice (their staff development role), but try to move audit responsibility away from the quality care unit (Ashcroft, 2008:36). Apart from the educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP), the Netherlands program for institutional strengthening of post-secondary education and training capacity (NPT) has supported various activities in relation to developing a national quality assurance system for higher education in Ethiopia and establishing academic development and resource centres (ADRCs) in public universities. In 2005 the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam ran a workshop on quality assurance for presidents and vice presidents of public universities in Addis Ababa, conducted a short workshop for members of the HERQA board, and assisted in undertaking a pilot quality audit at public universities as well as provided training and support for HERQA staff (HERQA, 2008: 34). The establishment of HERQA, HESC, EQUIP and ADRC would contribute to the quality care in higher education and to staff development in higher education institutions. According to Zenawi (2006: 14-15), when government funds higher education, students and employers, talk about value for money and fitness for purpose, they want to reassure that every birr that is spent on higher education in Ethiopia is well spent and

is being used to its maximum good. This can mean that there is pressure put on HEIs by the government or by the ministry of education to ask both public and private institutions to produce the maximum number of graduates of the highest quality but at the lowest possible cost.

Although many efforts have been made by HERQA, ADRC, HESC, NTP and EQUIP to establish an effective quality assurance / audit system at the university level, current studies indicate that the quality assurance system in higher education institutions in Ethiopia is inadequate. That is why I am more interested to investigate the core problem of quality assurance system implementation in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Government is in a strong position to impose this mandate. Government influence over the direction and value of the private sector is achieved less directly through the Ministry of Education's accreditation process. Private HEIs are given or refused a "license". The government also encourages or discourages the expansion of the private sector through a variety of other instruments such as import duty on books and other teaching materials, the allocation of land, access to cheaper credit and loans, and a variety of other financial and judicial measures (Rayner & Tesfaye 2005)

2.7.1. Quality Assurance Framework in Ethiopia

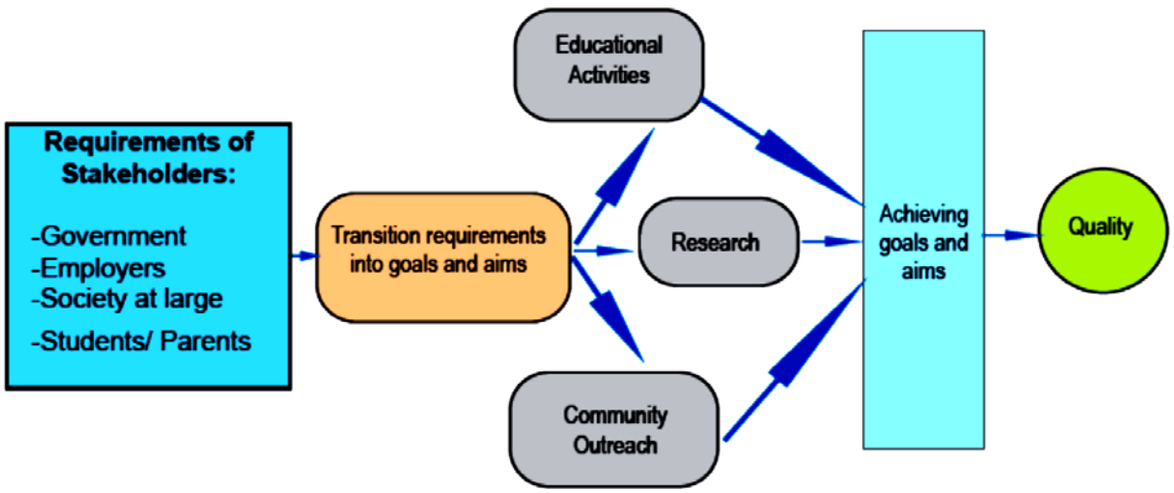


Figure 2.4 Quality assurance frameworks in Ethiopian higher education institutions

Source: from a road map to quality (DAAD, 2011: 17)

In the Ethiopian context, HERQA (2005: 23) reached consensus and accepted “Quality as fitness for purpose” as a working definition, which means that an institution must have in place adequate mechanisms to assure achievement of its stated aims and objectives. So if we fulfil these objectives up to the standards, we might claim that we have maintained the quality. Therefore, the requirements of all stakeholders should be translated into the mission and goals of an institution and into the objectives of a faculty and of the educational program as far as possible.

The leadership of an academic institution will provide guidance and direction to implement the set policies, to achieve the identified objectives, and to define “quality”. The prevailing influence of the leader helps to optimize the organizational resources, and motivate the faculty to produce the best within them. A proactive leader may perceive the upcoming challenges and opportunities; hence prepare his/her institution to confront these challenges and opportunities effectively and efficiently. The challenges and opportunities can be either changing workplace requirements, upgrading of curriculum, faculty hiring, training, and retaining, or setting the performance benchmarks in every aspect and measuring them effectively. A successful leader not only provides the clear vision and competitive strategies to achieve ambitious goals, but also enhances the institutional image and credibility among faculty and students in particular and society in general. A leader also works to prepare his/her successor for the survival of the institution and promote others to work in an environment conducive to teaching and learning with open thinking (UNESCO, 2008: 12-14). Quality assurance as a vehicle of government policy to steer higher education mainly to assess the quality of the final product of tertiary education, and the assessment is also related to the educational performance of the institution. A national framework for quality assurance usually covers both external and internal dimensions and criteria of quality. In Ethiopia, the national quality assurance procedures embody both external and internal processes and are steered by a government policy framework, assessment dimensions and criteria (HERQA & Ashcroft, 2008).

HERQA’s task is to coordinate universities’ quality assurance and improvement processes, reinforce their quality management systems and ensure that their quality assurance processes are aligned with the principles articulated above as well as monitoring outcomes.

HERQA reviews the strategy and ensures that internal processes are coherent with external reporting and audit requirements, using standards appropriate to research-intensive universities internationally. The Academic Board provides a significant parallel approach in regard to the coordination of the reviews of faculties.

In Ethiopian higher education, the policy framework for universities within the national quality assurance process is that the outcomes of university education are scrutinized in cycles of five years through an external process, and the universities develop and review their own internal processes that are checked by an external agency every five years (HERQA, 2006: 6-12). The main elements of the policy frameworks are the following: strategic planning that will enable the institution to describe its objectives and outcomes of education; a code of practice to judge the institution's standards and criteria of quality; processes that will help clarify the dimensions of criteria accepted in subjects and programs through regular self-assessment; and external assessment mechanisms that can evaluate institutional outcomes and processes for quality assurance (HESC & HERQA, 2006: 21, 25).

At national level HERQA is responsible for conducting national quality audits, revealing public reports on the outcomes of the audits, reporting criteria of processes audited. HERQA functions as an independent not-for-profit agency. It conducts quality audits of individual universities on site every five years. The audit panels are appointed by HERQA (HERQA 2006: 12). According to HERQA and Abebe Dinku (2008: 21) quality in higher education in the Ethiopian context means "fitness for purpose". Quality is judged by assessing to what extent intended outcomes are being achieved. HEIs have the responsibility for the quality of their own educational programs and its assurance. Quality in higher education considers:

Input: learning resources, staff profile, students admission
Process: teaching, learning and assessment processes
Outcomes: graduate employability and achievements and research results.

The assessment includes mainly: interview and inspection, documentation presented, material provisions (quality and quantity), staff deployment, curriculum description, rules and regulations.

2.8. CRITERIA AND STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

In discussions of quality and standards, there is often confusion over the use of the terms. Quality is not the same as quality assurance, and standards are not the same as quality. Furthermore, quality and standards are both distinct. The simplest way of conceptualizing the difference is to see quality as about process and standards as a means of evaluating the outcomes. The quality of higher education is evaluated, for example, by examining the process through which the student learns. The standard of higher education would be evaluated by examining what the student has learned, namely the outcome of the learning process (Harvey & Stensaker, 2007: 56, 78).

Quality assurance is a mechanism for ensuring an appropriate learning process; it could be a degree of control over what is permitted as a higher education experience, or ensuring that the institution complies with basic requirements, or is accountable to its stakeholders, including funders and students, or has processes in place to enhance the learning process. EUA (2010: 53) defines quality standards as follows:

Quality standards are sets of norms that, within the quality assurance process, specify the expectations on providers and, indeed, the quality assurers themselves. Standards and Guidelines are a set of quality standards but they judge neither the quality nor the standards of higher education provision. Quality is equivalent to the way the game is played, the rhythm of the golf swing and accuracy of the shot. The standard would be the score achieved by the Golfer. The quality standard would be the “par” score: the expected number of strokes a good player should take to complete the course. Quality assurance would be equivalent to the match referee.

As I mentioned before, the situation is slightly more complicated by there being a variety of definitions of quality in higher education: quality as excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation (Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey, 2006). Further, standards apply to academic outcomes, standards of competence, the standard of service provided to students and to standards applied to its own functioning by the institution (Harvey 1995, 2006: 153).

Having accepted a workable definition of quality, there is another hot topic: how do we assess the quality? How do we measure the quality? What are the criteria for measuring quality? What are the standards against which quality is assessed? If we look at what is said about quality, it becomes obvious that it is impossible to identify one set of criteria or standards for the quality of higher education. The parties concerned will have their own criteria and norms derived from their own objectives and/or demands. This means that a government will formulate other criteria than an employer will do. It is impossible to formulate general criteria for higher education in advance. They will differ from discipline to discipline and from stakeholder to stakeholder. The expectations of the labour market will play a totally different role when assessing the arts and humanities as opposed to electrical engineering, for example. The criteria of the different partners may actually conflict. Government may put forward as one of the criteria that “the program must be organized in such a way that students can finish it with a minimum dropout rate and within the given time”; or “the success rate in the first year should be 70%’. However, these criteria may clash with a student criterion, namely that “the program should offer enough options and enough time for personal development”. We have no absolute gauge at our disposal to measure the quality of education. Standards and criteria are also a matter of bargaining and negotiating between the parties involved. An absolute value for the academic level or the quality of the graduates does not exist. What is generally accepted as quality is a matter of opinion.

Quality standards are of undisputed importance within all types (national, institutional, regional, or international) of quality assurance systems in higher education. They can be found – though in various forms and differently levelled – in hundreds of higher education institutions (ENQA, 2007: 71) and they are regular components of political statements concerning the European higher education area. Furthermore, as declared in the Bergen communiqué, they urge higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance. Undoubtedly, any set of general formal standards (often in the form of minimum standards) is able to constitute a framework for quality assurance systems by establishing points of reference for measurement procedures and comparative purposes. Such strategies do not only meet public accountability demands

but also accommodate the increased competitive tendencies within higher education by providing a basis for various ranking and rating procedures; yet, the introduction of quality standards rarely goes according to plan, and all too often the unintended consequences of their implementation thwart the initial intentions.

As a concept, standards are rather difficult to grasp, and are often lumped together with similar concepts such as indicators, benchmarks, measures and norms. Definitions of standards vary internationally, which may be attributed to linguistic particularities as well as to differing contexts of application and use. Standards can become quality standards if actors/ institutions reach an agreement to link them with quality. Yet, since quality itself is a complex construct with various dimensions and different meanings (Harvey, 1995; Harvey & Green, 1993: 120, 88), it is important to consider which quality notion they are built upon or aimed at. Teaching quality, for example, has been frequently linked to students' satisfaction standards or to competence standards. In each case the implications for setting, changing or raising the respective standards differ substantially. Yet, in principle, all standards have normative functions (Classing and Gruber, 2001), whether they provide consistent scales and measures, regulate actions, set limits or facilitate comparison. It is necessary, though, to take a close look at how such norms are handled. On one hand, standards can be addressed as fixed parameters,

which does not give much leeway (flexibility) to the actors involved, while on the other hand, they can be used as adaptable concepts which react sensitively to changes of their base of reference (e.g. in the case of upper or lower limit standards with a broad range of tolerance). EUA cited in Lueger & Vetor (2010: 53) indicates that apart from their normative purpose, standards can be functionalized in many ways:

1. Easing manageability. This function is among the most visible, as it aims at verifying whether quality goals have been achieved. It provides an orientation and establishes a basis for action routines. In this regard, the compliance with standards is considered to allow conclusions about the quality of an institution, its activities, processes and outcomes which are assessed against standards. Paradoxically, standards used in this way have some counterproductive effects as well. The more precisely they are defined, the more necessary it will became to specify them even further in order to include any potential circumstances (or

exclude any unwanted alternatives). In addition, the actors bound to such standards are dispossessed of a considerable degree of autonomy as all important decisions are already pre-made.

2. Permitting comparability and assessment. Standards can be used for comparative purposes as well as for assessment within various contexts (e.g. providing evidence whether certain quality goals have been met or presenting a basis for accreditation procedures). In order to make such comparisons / assessments possible, standards should be defined quite clearly and allow easy verification of whether they have been met (Stack, 2004: 125). Conversely, this may cause some problems as well, because standards fulfilling this function tend to be restricted to easily measurable aspects (e.g. number of publications as a measure for research quality or students satisfaction scales as measure of teaching quality), potentially overlooking aspects that might be at least equally important but are also more difficult to assess (Lueger & Vettori, 2007). And, finally yet importantly, as most universities can be characterized as organizations with a high degree of internal differentiation / heterogeneity, comparative standards can rarely claim general validity.

3. Meeting accountability demands. Universities that want to claim (and prove) that they conform to the requirements for high-quality education research and administration can support such claims (provide evidence) by formulating and implementing quality standards, thus making their quality efforts visible to the outside world. Standards fulfilling such an accountability function ensure transparency and demonstrate what is being done in order to legitimate public trust (and financial support). On the down side, this leaning towards externally accepted success factors and best practices may very well lead to increased levels of standardization and homogenization within the higher education community (Harvey & Stensaker, 2007: 54).

4. Raising quality awareness and empowering quality promoters. Quality standards can also direct the attention of institutional actors towards quality-relevant aspects of their daily work and interactions, thus encouraging them to consider these aspects in their action and decision-making processes. Such process-oriented standards may unfold their full potential by supporting the development of localized, customized quality strategies that pay attention

to the diverging interests, quality notions and subcultures within a university (Vettori, 2007: 77).

It is clear that the establishment of quality standards can provoke a multitude of differing – even opposite – effects: they can encourage individual and institutional engagement for quality development or discourage it; they can contribute to a university's homogenization or promote differentiation in the sense of localized quality standards; they can support the fulfilment of external requirements or focus on internal development (Vettori, 2007: 100). Not everything can be achieved at the same time and with the same means. Yet, within such zones of ambiguity, it is necessary to be aware of the benefits and costs of each option and to make sure that they suit the overall strategies. If the overall goal is to strengthen a certain kind of quality culture, some ways of functioning standards may hinder rather than help. This is even more important to bear in mind, as most functions of quality standards seem to be closely related to the hope of attaining a reliable instrument for quality management, which helps to foresee (and influence) institutional progress, enables key actors to obtain control of development processes and demonstrates quality efforts to external stakeholders – an approach not entirely in line with the quality culture concept promoted by EUA and various other authors in recent years. Thus, after taking a second, complementary analytical perspective to quality standards, EUA (2008: 1-4) summarizes quality standards as follows:

1. Standards as minimum threshold

This type of standard constitutes some kind of minimum level as a basis for further actions / developments (e.g. an official authorization to study programs, admittance to an elitist community, allocation of public funds in the context of performance agreements, etc.). Minimum threshold standards are usually intended to reduce uncertainties. In a way, they can be regarded as quality seals that work very much like conditional models: if "A" is given, then "B" will very likely occur. Such standards can be used for two types of regulatory actions: first, by making clear what has to be done in order to meet the standards; second, by specifying how something has to be done in order to meet the standard. Finally, minimum threshold standards make rather small contributions to an organization's quality improvement / quality development. Even though, as Harvey states, the threshold standards approach to quality implies that quality is improved if the thresholds are raised, the scope of such

improvements seems very narrow, confining them to areas that can be easily measured and influenced.

2. Standards as broad objectives

The second type of standard is more output oriented, defining certain outcomes or performance oriented objectives that should be achieved, yet without necessarily specifying them or even breaking them down to palpable indicators (in contrast to minimum threshold standards). Consequently, such standards can often be found in mission statements or agreements on objectives documents. The actors guided by such standards are autonomous in their decision-making choice. On the other hand, they face increased pressure for substantiating and justifying their decisions and actions, especially if the results deviate from the requirements – which can have various reasons. Broad objective standards usually adhere to long-term perspectives and are intended to offer orientations. In most cases, how such standards should be met is not regulated. In other words, even though the “ends” are given, the “means” are not (or only partially). Nevertheless, their implementation can well be accompanied by guidelines and recommendations. In general, the broad objective type of standard seems to get along well with a development-oriented perspective, yet we should keep in mind that the direction and outcome of such development is difficult to gauge.

3. Standards as description of good practice

This type of standard (EUA, 2008; Vettori, 2007) usually emerges from broadly accepted routines and gains most of its legitimacy from them. Some principles have proven to be effective (and acceptable) and are therefore at some point declared a standard. Such good-practice standards are usually procedure oriented, meaning that, in contrast to broad objective standards, they rather focus on how to achieve a certain aim. On the other hand, good-practice standards have the major advantages of being accepted by and relevant for the people affected by them. On the minus side, they can be difficult to implement and are often bound to a specific context. Additional difficulties may arise if the implementer fails to adapt the practices to the specific organizational culture and environment.

It is obvious that each type of standard has different advantages; their success in terms of improving or influencing quality in the intended way is strongly dependent on how they are

adapted and embedded within the overall quality framework of an institution. Again, the major question is whether these standards are centrally defined, implemented from the top down and monitored in order to ensure their persistent functioning, or rather, negotiated among different actors and stakeholders, introduced in a way that pays close attention to differing claims, concerns and issues (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 213) and being constantly revised and redesigned if necessary. Since quality standards will only fully function if the actors concerned actually adhere to them (or even better, accept and support them), questions of development and implementation seem to be of paramount importance.

I turn now in more detail to the relationship between centralized and decentralized quality management approaches (which would require a different management approach instead of being purely *laissez-faire*). Centrally organized quality assurance systems show a tendency to establishing rules that are generally binding, not least to signal to the external stakeholders that the university management is paying close attention to the university's equal deficits. One quite popular means of achieving this effect is the implementation of threshold standards as some minimum basis for future improvements and the definition of very clear and easily measurable objectives. Whereas centralized systems tends to focus on top-down implementation of generalized quality management strategies and models, decentralized systems rely strongly on delegating decision-making power and monitoring duties to those actors that are ultimately the ones who establish quality within a university (e.g. teachers, researchers, students and administrators). In this latter approach, quality standards are mainly regarded as a participative instrument for organizational development oriented towards "flexibilization" rather than standardization. After dealing with centralization versus decentralization, next we will focus on the question of how quality standards can be meaningful instruments for change within a participative quality culture framework, and outline a few points for putting such a model into practice.

The quality culture approach promoted by EUA (EUA 2006, 2005) differs clearly from more traditional quality management strategies, shifting attention to more development-oriented and value-based aspects. The approach demands the involvement of multiple internal and external stakeholders, underlining the fact that a quality culture cannot be implemented from

above, yet on the other hand ambivalently stating that strong leadership may be necessary to starting and promoting the process in the first place. This ambivalence concerning the relationship of top-down and bottom-up ideas (or differing management ideologies respectively) will pose one of the major challenges for the approach in future years.

It has to be stated that the concept is still under-developed in terms of theory, especially with regard to the meaning of culture within the overall framework, even though this deficit seems to have gained increased attention in recent times (Harvey & Stensaker, 2007; Vettori et al., 2007). Quality culture is defined as stakeholder dependent, historically grown and learning oriented social phenomena that can barely be managed, making it difficult to predict future developments. Such a participative quality culture is never homogeneous since it reflects the complexity of the interactions and interpretations from which the culture emerges. Interventions are possible, but often only in an indirect way that takes localized and sub-cultural differences into account; the latent premises for perceptions and actions are only slowly changing and cannot be directly tackled.

The main argument in this thesis is that different types of standards are differently suited for supporting and influencing quality assurance and quality improvement. We should pay more attention to the ways they are adapted in order to realize the overall objective, even if the quality culture approach may basically be a tool for analyzing “who we are” instead of “who we want to be” (Stensaker, 2007: 89).

2.9. QUALITY ASSURANCE MODELS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are different approaches to quality assurance. The meaning of quality assurance may vary depending on the field of activity. Different countries have evolved quality assurance models for their higher education systems as necessitated by their unique national contexts. Nevertheless, in all activities related to quality assurance across the world there is a common unifying thread that ties together the basic concepts (NAAC, 2006:132). This thesis discusses the current and prominent quality assurance models and different quality assurance practices in use in higher education institutions.

2.9.1. Total quality management systems (TQMs)

Woodhouse (2003: 90-91) mentions that a critical element of the TQM method is that it is highly "people oriented" and participative. It assumes that a quality culture is an integral and necessary part of an organization, and that all line functions within an organization are contiguous with quality. This approach considers that all members of an organization are responsible for quality assurance (maintenance and improvement) and thus that quality is not a centralized activity, but devolved to various functional and organizational levels. He further explains that, in order to successfully implement TQM, the staff should be open minded and continuously updated and trained. The focus should be on reinforcing employee commitment for a positive effect on morale, ultimately leading to productive gains. The key to success is teamwork and the involvement of all stakeholders. The success of TQM implementation is the ability to monitor the progress and review the objectives. Woodhouse (2003: 91) emphasizes quality as continual improvement. Taking the quality management practices from TQM and ISO: 9000, Woodhouse encourages higher education specialists to consider the use of quality audits, such as "Plan–Do–Correct–Act" (PDCA). Continuous improvement is an incremental improvement of the ongoing process; it is the philosophy to improve the quality of goods and services of an organization. As we know, in general everything deteriorates with time and use. Continuous improvement is an intervention to stop and increase quality Woodhouse (2003) and Temponi (2005: 26-30) identify four processes of continuous improvement known as Deming's P–D–C–A cycle. The four major steps of the cycle can be explained as follows:

P (PLAN) – Gather data to identify and define the issue / problem that needs improvement and identify ways to achieve it.

D (DO) – Implement the plan by using a trial run, a test group, etc.

C (CHECK) – Analyze the results to see if there is good agreement between the original goals and what was actually achieved; make adjustments if necessary.

A (ACT) – Depending on the results of the check, act on the plan or conduct further work by beginning with the **P (PLAN).** In his later work, Deming replaced "check" with "study"

because he wanted to emphasize the process of learning as more important than the limited action of checking or inspection. Thus, the P-D-C-A cycle is also called the P-D-S-A cycle.

Figure 2.5 Deming's P–D–S–A cycle

The major underlying principle here is self-assessment, and thus this is the right fit for an academic institution. Also, the P-D-S-A cycle is in line with all models of quality assurance including TQM. We can apply the P-D-S-A cycle to all our academic activities including classroom teaching (Neave, 1990: 118).

Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC)

As stated by West-Bum ham, (1992) as well as Lewis and Smith (1994), an Internal Quality Assurance Cell expects commitment from all involved parties and also recommends empowerment of the participants, which is possible through regular staff development activities. In India, for example, the NAAC proposes that every accredited institution should establish an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to continuously improve quality as enhancement and sustain the good work of the institution. The IQAC will facilitate the process of internalization of the quality and play a catalytic role in performance improvement of an institution. All the accredited institutions with the IQAC are expected to submit an annual quality assurance report to the National Quality Assurance Agency as self-reviewed progress reports. The IQAC will create internal awareness on quality issues and establish credibility for the external quality evaluation. Training and development on quality as well as other factional competencies of academic and non-academic staff are crucial to the

continuous improvement and development of a culture of quality. A quality organization is one that has a “culture of quality”; quality is its hallmark in whatever it does. This includes its mission and goals that are focused towards the customers (students), its activities and processes are standardized (there are documented practices, which can reply to what, Why and How), and it satisfies the need of the stakeholders (society and employers) and goes beyond expectations to create “customer delight”.

The notion of continuous improvement moves a quality institution (that conforms to standards) towards excellence. With the establishment of an IQAC, and internalization of quality in all spheres of activity, it is important for the leadership and governance systems of the institution to plan and move towards excellence. This is to emphasize that quality is not a static phenomenon; it is dynamic, and the excellence target keeps on moving. Kanji and Tambi (1999: 215) present a model of excellence based on the principle of continuous improvement as explained below:

PLAN

Commitment of leadership to quality assurance
Quality is an internal culture
Quality systems are in place
Annual strategic plans for improvement of quality towards excellence

DO

Deployment of qualified and appropriate work force as needed.
Assuring systematic implementation of planned processes
Use of appropriate technology

CHECK/ STUDY

Review of outputs
Measure against strategic plan
Report and disseminate the lessons learnt organization-wide.

ACT

Take appropriate steps in the light of the results

Plan for the next cycle

TQM implementation is influenced by certain TQM principles and core concepts that are critical for organizational success (Kanji & Tambi, 1999). The TQM "movement" has been very broad, covering many approaches and models.

2.9.2. ISO 9000 standards

ISO 9000: 2000 is in fact a family of standards developed to assist organizations in implementing and operating effective quality management systems. ISO 9000: 2000 is a procedural approach and represents a real step forward in quality management, since it aims at "customer satisfaction assurance", not just product quality assurance, and it has a process view (Conti, 1999: 456). The new standards comprise three parts: ISO 9000: 2000, which covers underlying concepts; ISO 9001:2000, which is the actual specification for quality management systems; and ISO 9004:2000, which is designed as a guide for those organizations that want further improvement of their quality system. The idea is explained below.

ISO: 9001 and 9004 standards each has a different character. The 9001 is a so called "good enough" model which defines minimum requirements for quality assurance systems. If organizations satisfy the requirements, they can get certification based only on ISO 9001: 2000. In contrast to 9001, 9004 is a "better and better" model, which offers help to develop a management system beyond the minimum requirement status into the TQM sphere. As a consistent pair, ISO 9001 and ISO 9004 have the same structure and the same terminology. ISO 9004 contains the requirements of ISO 9001 and adds recommendations to gain impressive improvements

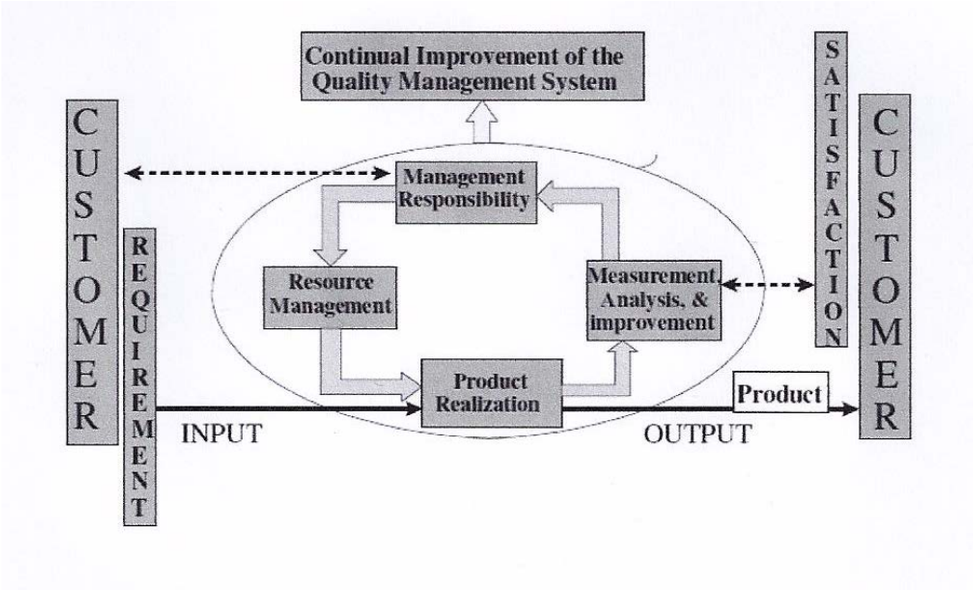


Figure 2.6 the basic ISO 9001:2000 model (Source: Schraim, 2006)

The declining quality of graduates, increasing competition and a growing mandate for accountability by accreditation associations, legislatures, and funding bodies have “forced” higher education institutions to focus on quality. The successful acceptance and implementation of quality systems in higher education are often assisted by externalities such as conducive government regulations, economic conditions, confident leadership and a certain level of stress to initiate a need for change (Schraim, 2006: 89).

The ISO: 9000 quality system provides a framework to establish quality systems in teaching and learning in HEIs. The ISO: 9000 quality system is a model that provides a unique framework for any organization to establish a customer-oriented quality system that is internationally recognized and can be independently assessed and certified. Among all the ISO: 9000 quality systems, the latest ISO series (ISO: 9001 version 2000) is more generic and flexible in nature, and has both customer requirements and customer satisfaction as an integral part of the standard. The ISO 9000: 2000 is based on a process model that emphasizes continuous improvement. Kartha, C.P (2004: 313) summarizes eight quality principles as visualized in ISO 9000: 2000. These are:

1. **Customer focus**: Organizations depend on their customers and therefore should understand current and future customer needs, meet customer requirements, and strive to exceed customer expectations.
2. **Leadership**: Leaders establish unity of purpose and give direction to the organization. Their responsibility is to create an internal environment that can facilitate achievement of the organization's objectives.
3. **Involvement of people**: This principle emphasises that people at all levels are the essence of an organization and they should be involved for organizational benefits.
4. **Process approach**: A desired result is achieved more efficiently when activities and related resources are managed as a process.
5. **Systems approach to management**: Identifying and managing interrelated processes as a system contributes to the organization's effectiveness and efficiency.
6. **Continuous improvement**: A permanent objective of the organization should be continuous improvement of its performance.
7. **Fact-based decision making**: Decisions are based on the analysis of data and information.
8. **Mutually beneficial supplier relationship**: An organization and its suppliers are interdependent and a mutually beneficial relationship enhances the ability of both to create value.

2.9.3. Proposed elements of a comprehensive quality framework

Each model cited in the previous section implies its own unique perspective on educational quality in a higher education institution. At the implementation level, there is a complementarities among the models to develop a rich picture of the nature of required actions. To arrive at an all-round, comprehensive model of quality management for higher education institutions, I argue for the use of the complementarities, adding the strengths of one model to the strengths of another model, thus eliminating blind spots and other weaknesses that would result from applying only a single model. Csizmadia (2006: 68) summarizes the features of a comprehensive framework, addressing quality management in higher education approaches as follows:

A clear focus on designing, implementing and maintaining a quality assurance system;

Organizational quality policy has to be developed, disseminated and improved continuously;

Design of curricula should be continually developing and improving in a responsive way, informed by feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders;

Improve methods of teaching and learning's teaching materials, and students' learning environment;

design of student evaluation processes and activities to design, review and improve the examination of students, the examination of student learning and the relation of examination to educational objectives and to utilize the evaluation results;

Resource management demands control of processes regarding how organizations use resources to enhance education quality;

A quality information system is necessary to support the different processes concerning quality management;

There is a clear role for leaders in higher education institutions to be committed in developing, maintaining and improving quality and the quality assurance system.

Overall, an attempt at synthesizing the essence of the quality management models for higher education and implementing them should begin to provide a framework of educational excellence in higher education. Such a comprehensive framework emphasises the education function of higher education institutions and provides the support processes directly connected with teaching and learning.

2.10. INTERNATIONAL QA PRACTICES

In this part, I examine the practices of quality assurance in some selected developed and developing countries. Quality assurance is viewed differently in different countries around the world. Each has its own philosophy and practice, with different systems of accreditation and quality assurance, and educational atmosphere (QAA, EUA, and AUQA, 2008).

2.10.1. The Australian QA experience

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), an independent, national quality assurance agency established by state and national governments to promote, audit, and report on quality assurance in higher education, audits Australian higher education institutions. Its primary responsibility is to conduct such audits every five years. The process involves an institutional self-evaluation, a site visit by a panel of auditors, and publication of an audit report that contains commendations and recommendations. Institutions are required to provide provisional reports to AUQA on their progress in implementing recommendations (AUQA, 2008: 53).The AUQA is an independent body established by MCEETYA to audit teaching, learning, research and administration in Australian universities on a five-yearly cycle. The AUQA also audits the processes of state, territory and commonwealth higher education accreditation authorities. AUQA advocates a “fitness for purpose” approach. Harvey and Knight (1996) describe this type of approach as universities being audited against their missions and objectives. The scope of an institutional audit includes assessing the adequacy of an institution’s organizational leadership, governance and planning; teaching and learning; support mechanisms for staff and students; and communication with internal and external stakeholders (AUQA, 2007& 2008).

Apart from its fitness for purpose approach, the AUQA is required to assess the extent to which universities comply with external reference points, such as the National Protocols. Institutions are expected to describe how they use relevant guidelines and legislation to guide their objectives and practices, and determine their standards and performance outcomes (Blackmur,D, 2004; AUQA, 2008). Universities in Australia are public or private autonomous bodies, which accredit their own courses. These institutions typically have in place a system of formal, cyclical reviews involving external assessors for the development/evaluation of programmes and organizational units. Other monitoring processes involve gathering external feedback through periodic surveys. For some institutions, participation in Australian and/or international higher education networks and the benchmarking projects undertaken by these networks is a significant part of their quality management process (AUQA, 2008: 59).

The AQF and QA processes in Australian education and training

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was developed under instruction from the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and is a key national policy instrument to protect the quality of Australian education and training wherever it is delivered. The AQF Council has a policy role rather than an operational function in implementation of the AQF; similarly, the extensive quality assurance processes that underpin AQF qualifications are the responsibility of each of the sectors (Kells, 1995 & Murdoch, 2003).

The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework has been developed and supported by Australian State, Territory and Commonwealth governments and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. It comprises interlinking university and government quality assurance processes and instruments of national policy. Universities are “self-accrediting”; that is, they are authorized to accredit their own courses and are responsible for their academic standards. They must have appropriate quality assurance processes in place, including peer- assessment processes, external examination of higher degrees and the involvement of professional bodies in the accreditation of particular courses (AUQA, 2008: 11)

PROCESS OF SELF-REVIEW

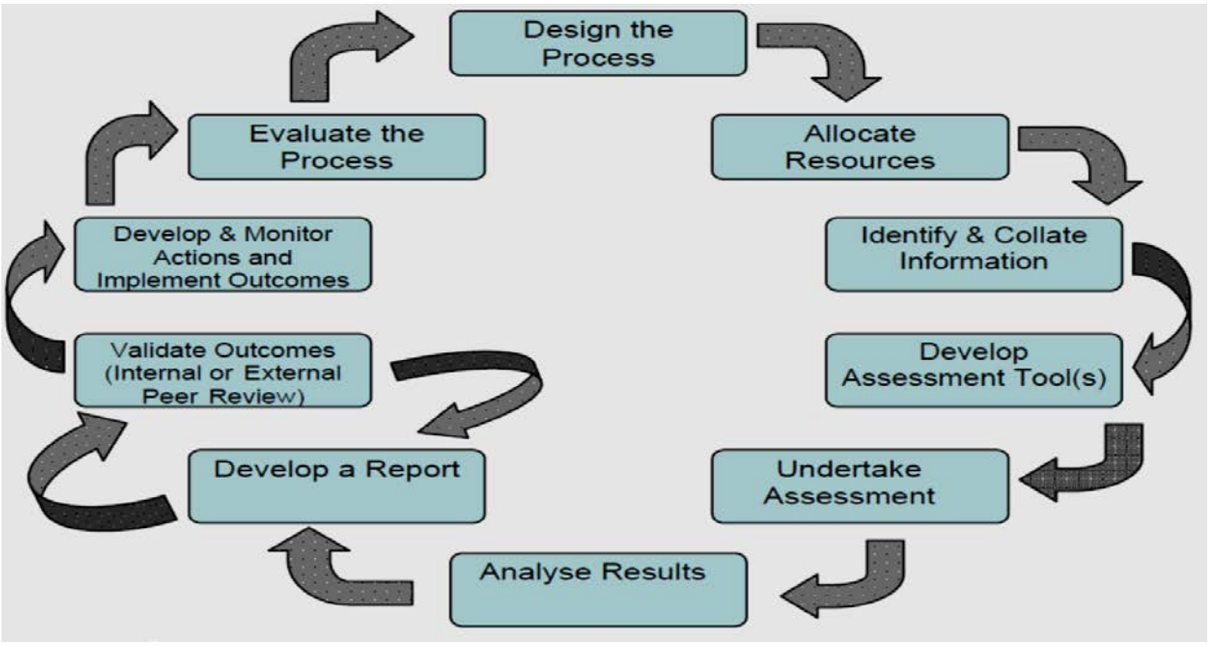


Figure 2.7 Main stages of a self-review process in Australia (adapted from Kells, 1995: 33 and Murdoch, 2003: 4-5)

Watson and Maddison (2005) put the stages of self-review in Australian universities as explained below.

Step 1: Designing the process

It is a habitual part of institutional management. Ownership is defined through both executive and academic functions of the institution. There is focus on reflection and learning, using sensible tools and approaches in an intelligent manner. It is a bottom-up activity, and truly collective, engaging staff and students. There is clear definition of roles and responsibilities relating to the process. Its focus is aligned to institutional goals and culture. Its primary goal is to understand and enhance student learning and the quality of the student experience. It is kept in proportion, taking account of other institutional activities and priorities.

Step 2: Allocation of resources

The scope and purpose of the self-review will guide resource allocation (financial, human, physical and information).

Step 3: Identifying and collating information

This can be a difficult stage of the process. Often educational processes are hard to measure and effects upon students are often intangible and delayed (Schmitz and Whitworth, 2002: 135). However, clear information including performance measures and outcomes on which to base judgments is fundamental in ensuring a successful self-review. Information (whether facts or opinions) should generally reflect both processes and outcomes, and depending on the scope of the review, may cover both institution-wide and local (operational) activities. External (benchmarking) information can provide comparative evidence of performance relative to other organizations, evidence of performance over time can facilitate an objective assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and provide ideas to stimulate thinking.

Step 4: Developing assessment tools

Assessment tools (whether administered as a survey or used as the basis for structured workshops/discussions) guide the self-review process and can assist in formulation of prompting questions for consideration against items/areas being assessed. Questions are

developed to elicit strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities by focusing on processes and outcomes related to the items/areas.

Step 5: Undertaking assessment

Depending on the approach chosen, assessment against the questions and data presented may occur through mechanisms such as: surveys/questionnaires; interviews; workshops; focus groups; or existing meetings/forums. Alternatively, various working groups may be convened with relevant expertise to consider specific issues/items within the self-assessment.

Step 6: Analysing results

Analysis of results can be done in various ways and will be contingent on whether assessment has been undertaken using qualitative or quantitative means (or both). The analysis needs to focus on identifying the key strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Step 7: Developing a report

As with the self-review process, there is no one model for a self-review report. The goal of a self-review process should be a report that fairly and honestly portrays the institution, area or program reviewed, avoids personal agendas, and warrants broad support amongst institutional stakeholders.

Step 8: Validation of outcomes

Validation, particularly by people independent of involvement in conducting the review, can enhance the acceptability and credibility of self-review outcomes and recommendations. Validation of the self-review outcomes (normally in the form of a report) may be undertaken using a variety of mechanisms. Examples include: internal peer evaluation (e.g. across faculties/schools, or by a committee); use of external expertise (e.g. an external panel, based on interviewing stakeholders; or an external expert, based on a review of the documentation); or a mixture of both. Existing structures,

such as advisory/industry committees, could also be used to develop and monitor actions and implement outcomes.

Step 9: Developing and monitoring actions and implementing outcomes

Once the self-review is finalized, the results need to be communicated. If recommendations for change have been made (as is normally the case), it is critical that clear responsibilities and accountabilities for actions to address these are identified by the area reviewed.

Step 9: Evaluation of the self-review process

Consistent with quality improvement principles, evaluation of the self-review process by participants and other stakeholders provides valuable lessons for the design and development of future self-review processes. Evaluation may be done informally (e.g. through verbal feedback) or more formally (e.g. by the administration of questionnaires/surveys).

2.10.2. The United States of America QA experience

Accreditation is the primary means by which the quality of higher education institutions and programs is assured in the United States. Accreditation is a form of self-regulation in which the higher education community in the United States has come together to develop standards, policies and procedures for self-examination and judgment by peers. Six regional accrediting agencies provide institutional accreditation. A further seven national accrediting agencies offer accreditation for particular types of institutions. Specialized accreditation agencies evaluate particular units, schools, or programs, especially those that require state licensing. There is no federal agency or ministry to control or oversee the post-secondary educational institutions in the USA. The accreditation is carried out by private, non-profit organizations designed and recognized for this specific purpose (Dickin University 2006). Accrediting agencies are accountable to the sector, the public, and the government and must undergo periodic external assessments to be recognized as accreditation organizations.

While the act of accreditation is a non-governmental activity, a creditors need to be recognized by the federal government as legitimate bodies. The federal government requires all a creditors to maintain criteria or standards in specific areas of institutional activity in order

to be recognized as accrediting authorities. As a result, this provides the government considerable leverage to influence the standards by which higher education institutions are accredited. The federal government requires accrediting bodies to assess institutions in the areas of: student achievement, curricula, faculty, facilities, fiscal and administrative capacity, student support services, recruitment and admissions practices, measures of the program duration and objectives of degrees or credentials offered and records of student complaints bodies (Council for Higher Education, and Blackmur (2004 : 106). The commission on accreditation (COA), founded in 1949, was the first national organization in the USA to develop criteria and recognize accrediting bodies. In 1997 the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) was created, which is now the agency to carry out the recognition function (USDE, 2005: 5). Thus, regional, national and specialized accreditation agencies apply for recognition to CHEA or the USA Department of Education (USED). The USDE recognition is required for a creditor whose institutions or programs seek federal grants and students aid funds. The CHEA recognition confers an academic legitimacy on accrediting organizations. The CHEA recognition of accrediting organizations is valid for ten years with a five-year interim report, while the USDE recognition review takes place every five years (NAAC, 2007: 17).

Accreditation in US is an ongoing process. Initial earning of accreditation by an institution is not entitled to indefinite accredited status. The accreditation process has five key features:

Self-study: institutions prepare a written summary of performance based on the standard criteria of the accrediting body.

Peer review: is conducted on the self-study report by a group of peers in the profession.

Site visit: is organized by the peer team to review the claims made in the self-study report. All team members are volunteers and are generally not compensated.

Action by accrediting organization: the accreditation agency either confers or denies accreditation.

On-going external review: institutions and programs continue to be reviewed over time for re-accreditation. This takes place every few years to 10 years (Eaton, J.S 2000: 102). According to Eaton (2000: 57) :

> *Accreditation is governed by standards of good practice. Accreditation is not obligatory – no institution in the U.S. is required to be accredited. Accreditation is a voluntary process. Standards for quality assurance are set by the higher education community itself and monitored by the same community. Accreditation is a sign of commitment by the institution to continuous development and improvement in the context of the dynamic sphere of higher education. It is more than a one-time procedure that is automatically renewed. Commitment to accreditation sets the tone for the way an institution operates in its financial, organizational and academic affairs.*

U.S. department of education (DOE)

The U.S. Department of Education is the branch of the U.S. government that is responsible for supervising federal (national) programs and for distributing federal funding for education. The DOE does not “accredit” or “recognize” institutions. The DOE does review accrediting agencies for purposes related to federal financial support for educational institutions and students. If an accrediting organization is “approved” by the DOE, the institutions that it accredits may be eligible for federal money and the students may be eligible for student financial assistance (CHEA, 2004: 23).

Council for higher education accreditation (CHEA)

CHEA is a non-governmental, private, non-profit membership organization for higher education institutions in the U.S. It has about 3,000 member institutions. CHEA is not an accrediting organization. Members of CHEA help to define standards for the approval of accreditation associations, and recognize accrediting associations that meet the criteria. For a creditor to be affirmed by CHEA, they must demonstrate their commitment to advancing academic quality, accountability, purposeful change and improvement, appropriate and fair decision-making, and continuous reassessment of this commitment. A list of accrediting organizations approved by CHEA can

be found at http://www.chea.org/Directories/index.asp, while the CHEA also provides information to the public about accreditation and why accreditation is an important issue.

Unapproved and “BOGUS” OR “FAKE” accrediting services

There are also bogus accrediting services whose accreditation does not reflect any type of quality assessment or criteria related to academic standards. Some only charge a fee for their accreditation. Some fake a creditors are tied to degree mill operations. Diploma mills or fake universities sometimes create their own fake accreditation agencies to give the appearance that they and the “universities” are legitimate. A new book on degree mills includes a list of “more than 200 fake, unrecognized and dubious accreditation agencies” (CHEA, 2004: 85).

The Baldrige criteria (Quality assessment model) or the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is the highest award for performance excellence managed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) used in the United States of America, “Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the quest for excellence on the one side and the presidential seal on the other. The president of the United States traditionally presents the award at a special ceremony in Washington DC. The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Logo and the phrases “The Quest for Excellence” and “Performance Excellence“ are trademarks and service marks of the National Institute for Standards and Technology (CHEA, 2009: 25-30). The Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence focus on the following seven core values and concepts:

Visionary leadership;
Student, stakeholder, and market focus;
Strategic planning;
Measurement, analysis and knowledge management;
Faculty and staff focus,
Process management; and
Organizational performance results

2.10.3. The South African QA experience

A quality assurance system was introduced in South Africa in 2004. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the CHE, a statutory advisory body. Its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) conducts audits of universities. The HEQC also accredits courses and does national reviews, quality promotion and capacity development. It reports directly to the Minister of Education.

These Quality Councils (QCs) oversee all education programs in South Africa. Umalusi serves as the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training, while the HEQC is the Quality Council for Higher Education. A new Quality Council – the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) – has brought together in one single body the quality assurance role formerly undertaken by the SETAs. However, the SETAs may continue to do quality assurance in their specific sectors, with the QCTO as an overarching organization (Allais, 2007: 3-4).

Professional associations

Many professions have associations that exist by law in order to maintain standards of education and testing within their profession. These bodies sometimes play a role in evaluating and licensing institutions that offer courses within their area of specialty. For example, the Engineering Council of South Africa monitors universities that offer engineering degrees, and only recognizes them if they reach certain standards. Sometimes, professional bodies also set their own examinations, which must be passed by people wanting to join the profession. For example, the Institute of Chartered Accountants sets an examination that must be passed by anyone who wants to practise as a chartered accountant (Caldwell, 2006: 96-98).

Sect oral education and training authorities (SETAS)

Sect oral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) exist in various sectors of the economy. Examples are identified by Caldwell (2006: 12):

> *The Mining Qualifications Authority, the Wholesale and Retail SETA, the Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging SETA, and the Banking SETA. One of the current Responsibilities of SETAs is to conduct quality assurance within their*
> *sectors. The main way in which they do this is through an accreditation model – that is, they accredit institutions which offer educational programs within their sectors of the economy. This is done largely within a quality management framework, whereby institutions must prove to the SETA that they have good quality management systems.*

Sometimes the SETAs also look specifically at the programs offered by the institutions; this is referred to as program approval. Sometimes the SETAs evaluate a sample of assessments conducted by the institutions in order to check that assessments adhere to the same standards (CHET & Umalusi, 2007). The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) carries out audits on universities every six years in the areas of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. It employs input, process, output and outcome type indicators as well as open-ended questions within its audit criteria. The review panel verifies the claims an institution makes in its self-evaluation and assesses them against its audit criteria. The review panel then prepares an audit report. After the first round of audits has been completed, the HEQC conducts an evaluative study that examines the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional audits (CHET& Umalusi, 2007). HEIs currently implement the quality imperatives of the HEQC with a primary focus on teaching and learning. The drive to satisfy the criteria of the HEQC, of which the outcome is the accreditation of programmes, does not satisfy customer expectations within a higher education landscape. HEIs should move a step forward, by creating a quality culture within higher education, thus eliminating the “burden” of being accredited to offer quality programmes (Kruger, 2009: 123).

The implementation of quality assurance initiatives in higher education in South Africa is neither new nor unfamiliar. A range of internal and external formal and informal quality assurance arrangements has been in place for many decades. What is new in relation to quality assurance in South Africa is the need to embed total quality management principles as a culture within higher education (Allais, 2007: 12).

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) ensures academic quality as a means of quality assurance by the implementation of institutional audits on teaching and learning, research and service learning at higher education institutions. There is a much greater need, in that customer satisfaction is still a matter of concern. Institutional quality, through the implementation of the ISO 9001: 2008 requirements, also including aspects of the SAEM model, would together improve the status of quality in HE. Institutional quality is addressed by adopting quality principles and institutional self-assessment approaches where issues like leadership, policy and strategy, people management and satisfaction, client/customer focus and satisfaction, resource and information management, processes, impact on society and organizational results are analyzed to determine the institution's strengths and areas to improve (CHET & Umalusi, 2007).

2.10.4. The United Kingdom (UK) QA experience

Higher education in the UK has an international reputation for excellence. Maintaining the highest academic standards and quality is crucial to keeping this reputation. All universities and colleges that provide higher education in the UK are autonomous. These institutions are not owned by the state, but most receive government funding distributed by the separate higher education funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales, and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (QAA 2008: 132). As stated by the EFQM (2009, 21), each university and college of higher education is responsible for the standards of the awards it makes and the quality of the education it provides to its students. Each has its own internal quality assurance procedures. The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in UK higher education rests with individual universities and colleges, each of which is independent and self-governing. The QAA checks how well they meet their responsibilities, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. They also publish guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems to ensure students have high quality experiences. Internationally, the QAA takes a leading role in developments in standards and quality. They enjoy a close relationship with international quality assurance agencies, monitoring and reporting on advances around the world (Borahan and Ziarat, 2007).

In addition (Radbourne & Nulty 2002) to their own systems for safeguarding standards and enhancing the quality of their provision, universities are also subject to a rigorous external review process conducted by the QAA. Each university is a degree-awarding body in its own right and is responsible for its own quality and standards. Individual universities have the primary, longstanding and legal responsibility for managing their quality to ensure that their students have a good experience and for maintaining standards to protect the value and currency of awards.

Universities fulfil their responsibilities for assuring standards and quality. Each university discharges these responsibilities with reference to the QAA Code of Practice and QAA, in turn, checks how they do this through its review process, which results in a published statement about the degree of confidence that can be placed in each university's ability to manage standards and quality. Every new degree programme proposed within a university will undergo a rigorous process of program approval. The department suggesting the degree must present a sound case to a program approval panel on the proposed content, structure, resources and market. The panel ensures that decisions are informed by full consideration of academic standards and of the appropriateness of the learning opportunities that will be offered to students. It also considers the planned outcomes, their delivery and assessment, and links to reference points of the Academic Infrastructure, for example ensuring that standards are in line with the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements as well as the institution's own award regulations (Higher Education Academy, Becket & Brooks, 2008).

The review process

The QAA undertakes "regular, formal, external reviews of universities, called Institutional Audit in England and Northern Ireland, Institutional Review in Wales, and Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) in Scotland". These occur every six years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and every four years in Scotland.

Although the review process varies in the different parts of the UK, its function is to examine the university's internal quality assurance and quality enhancement policies and processes, and to assess and report publicly on the level of confidence that can be placed in them. The QAA also uses reviews of institutions both to identify what it sees as good practice, and to

make recommendations about ways in which improvements might be made to the management of quality and standards. Institutional review is therefore the main way in which the QAA gathers evidence of the university's management of quality and standards.

While universities themselves are responsible for reviewing courses at subject level, the QAA review focuses on examining internal quality assurance and enhancement systems and strategies. The QAA uses a peer review process, in which teams largely comprising academic staff from other institutions visit universities. In Scotland the team includes an international reviewer. Students are also included in Scottish teams and there are moves towards making similar arrangements in England and Wales and Northern Ireland. Appointment to the review team is by nomination/application and each potential team member is considered against published criteria. Care is taken to ensure the reviewer cohort reflects appropriate sect oral, discipline, geographical, gender and ethnic balances. All reviewers must attend training prior to participating in a review. As indicated in UUK (2008 13-16), the review process includes self-assessment documents, student focus, report and judgment and follow-up.

By law, the UK funding bodies have a duty to provide for the assessment of the quality of the provision they are funding. Each of the funding bodies contracts with the QAA for quality assurance services. Each receives a copy of the full QAA report for each university within their jurisdiction. In discharging their quality remit, the funding bodies take account of these reports and may decide to comment on reports or to raise specific issues with individual universities. Each funding body meets regularly with the universities it funds and the outcome of QAA reviews routinely serve as a basis for discussion. Throughout the UK, if a funding body was not satisfied with a university's performance, it could ultimately withhold funding until the issues were addressed satisfactorily (HESA, 2008: 109).

The Higher Education Academy (HEA)

All UK universities currently subscribe to the Higher Education Academy, which also receives core funding from the UK funding councils. The Academy's major function is quality enhancement. Its mission is to support the higher education sector in providing the best possible learning experience for all students. It plays an important role in assisting

universities and colleges to improve the quality of teaching and the student experience in higher education, working closely with them and with the QAA. The Academy accredits over 200 programmes and professional development schemes in teaching for academics. It offers recognition of individual achievement through its fellowships and senior fellowships across the UK and the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme in England and Northern Ireland. It provides a UK-wide framework of support for learning and teaching at discipline level through its subject centres, and it supports universities and colleges in bringing about strategic change that will benefit the quality of the student experience, including by sharing good practice. The Academy has developed the UK Professional Standards Framework for the sector. The framework applies to all staff that teaches and supports learning in higher education (Maureen & Nine, 2009).

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Although each university approves its own courses, individual courses that lead to a professional or vocational qualification, or exemption from a professional examination, are usually accredited by a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRBs). For professions that are regulated by statute, only graduates of professional area concerned. This is an important safeguard for the public who uses services provided by such professionals (Maureen & Nine, 2009).

The National Health Service

The health service contracts with universities for nursing, midwifery and allied health professions education, and Strategic Health Authorities (in England) also take account of quality assurance matters in their contract monitoring activities. Their systems are designed to operate alongside those of universities and relevant PSRBs, and are being refined in the light of health service re-organization and the work of the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence, which is responsible for consistency and good practice in healthcare regulation (Higher Education Academy, 2007a: 20).

The QAA has worked with the sector to develop a set of reference points, known as the Academic Infrastructure. Institutions use this, and other reference points, to guide their policies for maintaining academic standards and quality (UUK, 2011: 21).The Academic

Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that give all institutions a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality and standards of their higher education courses. The Academic Infrastructure has four elements and all are inter-related. The Code of Practice is concerned with the management of quality and the other three give advice to institutions about setting standards (UUK & QAA: 2011).

Figure 2.8 Academic infrastructure in the UK (Source: QAA, 2011)

The UK Academic Infrastructure is a key to the process of assuring quality and standards across UK higher education. It comprises a collection of integrated concepts and documentation that have been developed by QAA and universities and provides a self-regulating national framework within which autonomous universities can describe and manage their academic standards and quality. Although it is, by its nature, a single set of external reference points, the Academic Infrastructure allows for diversity and innovation within courses offered by individual universities. All universities subscribe to the Academic Infrastructure and the QAA judges the extent to which they make use of it in managing the standards and quality of their courses. It is kept under continual review and is revised as appropriate (UUK & QAA, 2011).

The UK Academic Infrastructure is unique and much admired internationally. It is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, although it is more detailed and more specific to the expectations of UK higher education. The four elements of the Academic Infrastructure (UUK & QAA, 2011) are: the Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education; Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and

in Scotland; Subject Benchmark Statements; and Programme Specifications. These four individual elements relate to one another.

The Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards is essentially a set of guidelines on good practice in universities. Its ten themed sections range from admissions to course design, assessment and careers advice and provides a framework within which individual universities can consider the effectiveness of their approaches to learning and teaching related activity. The Code is designed so that every institution, regardless of its size, subject base, physical environment, population mix, needs to develop understanding or competence in that subject (Eastwood, Higher Education Summit 2007).

PART II: THEORETICA FRAMEWORK

In this part the theoretical framework is discussed. The part provides an overview of the theories that was used in this study.

2.11. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

In the field of organizational studies, various theories have been developed and applied over the years to examine and understand the aspects of organization (Greening & Gray, 1994: 467). My theoretical framework is based on organizational theories such as resource dependency perspective, neo-institutional theory, and organizational decision-making processes to examine the practices of quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. These theories have enabled me to investigate the importance of institutional quality assurance in policy implementation of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education institutions.

2.11.1. Resource dependency theory

The resource dependence approach explains how an organization manages to survive through its ability to acquire critical resources. The theoretical framework developed by Pfeiffer and Salancik (1978 : 99) service this purpose emphasizing that to understand organizations one must understand how they related to other actors in their environment . This approach is constructed on the basis of the fundamental assumption that all organizational action is ultimately directed at securing its survival. Organizations can have

basic goals and objectives, but if they do not exist, these cannot be attained. Thus, survival is the core objective of each organization and for survival it needs resource.

This theory advocates that higher education institutions depend on other actors whenever they strive for goals whose achievement can be facilitated by them. The resource dependence theory explains how an organization manages to survive through its ability to acquire critical resources. The theoretical framework developed by Salancik (1978: 112) emphasizes that to understand organizations one must understand how they relate to other actors in their environment. Survival is the core objective of each organization and for survival it needs resources.

No organization, however, is able to generate all of the distinctive resources that it needs. Therefore, to guarantee the flow of resources, an organization must interact with other organizations that control these resources, and thus it depends on them. Dependency by definition creates uncertainty, as uncertainty stems from actions that an organization cannot control. Organizations favour a predictable,

Stable existence, therefore they will attempt to minimize the uncertainty and their dependencies on externals in order to acquire more stability and autonomy (Oliver, 1991: 65). The fact that resources are obtained from other organizations means that the resource dependence model can among other things be thought of as an inter-organizational resource dependence model.

The potential for one organization influencing another, derives from its discretionary

Control over resources needed by the other and the other's dependence on the resources

And lack of countervailing resources and access to alternative sources (Pfeffer & Salancik,

1978: 53).

Some organizations thus might be more important to an organization than others with respect to resource acquisition. An organization will be more likely to follow the requirements of the supplier of resources when it depends on its sources. When the dependency is low, resistance represents minimal risk to organizational interests because it "is no longer held captive by a single or limited number of

sources of social support, resources or legitimacy" (Oliver, 1991: 164). Thus, in sum, the resource dependence theory implies that an organization's responses to external requirements can to some extent be predicted from the situation of resource dependencies confronting it.

Several studies have highlighted the usefulness of the resource dependency perspective in the study of higher education organizations (Goedegebuure, 1992; Huisman, 1995; Gornitzka , 1999). First, focusing on public higher education institutions in European (state-dominated) contexts, these studies have highlighted the resource dependence of higher education institutions on the central state, including different governmental actors, as a funding source (Huisman, 1995; Gornitzka :1999), since universities and colleges cannot generate most of the resources they need. The government decides on e.g. the budget for higher education and what is expected from the higher education institutions (Huisman, 1995: 123).

Effective implementation of a quality assurance system depends largely on the availability of human and financial resources. There is currently no link between quality assurance processes and public financing decisions for tertiary education. Without such a link, institutions lack the means and incentives to implement quality improvement recommendations. These funds have a positive impact on quality, but their sustainability will be better assured if at the policy level a clear connection is made between the quality assurance process and financing decisions for institutions (World Bank, 2004c & Materu, 2007: 21, 54). Furthermore, the resource dependence theory emphasizes commitment of resources to educational quality; how institutions use resources to enhance education quality and how quality assurance processes are adequately funded.

In addition to financial resources, the presence of experienced and highly qualified faculty members and administrators within institutions and competent professionals and technical staff in the national QA agency and institutional QA structure is indispensable. The success of academic review is particularly dependent on human capacity. The QA system in Africa (including those countries with strong economies like South Africa) is experiencing the difficulty of funding a sufficient number of academics who are qualified and available to serve as peer reviewers and lack of training for those involved in the process of quality assurance (Materu, 2007: 17). As stated by Huisman (1995: 75) .According to this theory, universities

and colleges cannot generate most of the resources they need. The resources of the government determine the budget for higher education and what is expected from higher education institutions. In Ethiopia, the dependence of public HEIs on government is very high. Accountability for the invested resource can be ensured through quality management; hence the expected introduction of quality mechanisms, among other things, in HEIs. There is a proposal that the less higher education institutions financially depend on government the later quality assurance systems will be implemented. This perspective concludes that institutions will be more likely to follow the requirements of the supplier of resources when it depends on those resources. As the aim of this study was to investigate to what extent the higher education institutions indeed respond to governmental demands for change, the resource dependence was a crucial approach because implementation of a QA system needs human and material resources. It also determines the success and failure of the system in both public and private higher education institutions.

2.11.2. Neo-institutional theory

From an institutional perspective , organizations operate in an environment dominated by rules , taken-for-grant assumptions , myths , and routines about what constitutes appropriate and acceptable organizational forms and behave (Mayer & Rowan 1977 : 35) . Many policies, programs and procedures of organizations are enforced by public opinion, by stakeholders and by laws. Such element of organizations is manifestations of Institutional rules which function as rationalized myth. The impact of rationalized institutional elements on organizations and organizing situation is summarized by Mayer & Rowan (1991: 45) as follows : “rationalized institutional rules arises in given domains of work activity , formal organizations form and expand by incorporating these rules as structural elements “ . In general , this perspective assumes that the institutional environment constrains the organization and determines its internal structure and , consequently, the behaviour of the actors in the organization . A central notion is that because of the pressure of the institutional environment, organizations show a trend towards conformity (denoted by the term isomorphism). The image of an organization is that the deviation from the expectation of the institutional environment threatens the legitimacy of (and therefore the chance of survival) of the organization. Furthermore, conformity often of a ritualistic nature where organizations construct symbols of compliance to environmental changes (Rowan 1977: 47).

The neo-institutional perspective highlights the survival value of conformity to institutional environments. Isomorphic institutions incorporate elements from their environment that are regularized externally to gain legitimacy, rather than to maximize efficacy. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that coercive, mimetic and normative forces produce homogeneity within a certain organizational field. Coercive isomorphism results from external pressures exerted on organization by other organizations upon which they depend and by cultural expectations in the society within which they function. Mimetic isomorphism functions under ambiguous goals or an uncertain environment, and organizations may imitate other organizations. The third source of isomorphic organizational change is normative and stems primarily from professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 67). Together, coercive, mimetic and normative institutional processes can contribute to an emergent norm regarding organizational structures and procedures and the implementation of reform such as in this study quality assurance mechanisms and their implementation.

Further, in neo-institutionalism, “legitimacy” is the dominant factor in securing stability and survival. In order to gain legitimacy, internal and external parties must show “confidence and good faith” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977: 58). Institutional theorists have contended that organizations facing conflicting, inconsistent demands about what practices they ought to use can maintain legitimacy by adopting designs that mask or distract attention from controversial core activities that may be unacceptable to some key constituents. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) stated, organizations are prompted to engage in various ceremonies or rituals to appease powerful constituencies or public attitudes. The term ‘institutional decoupling’ is understood as a formal mechanism that is adopted in response to external demands while actual practices are tailored to the needs of internal staff members (Scott, 1995: 32). Decoupling mechanisms are adopted primarily for external legitimization purposes and are kept separate from core organizational activities. Oliver (1991: 155) noted, “From an institutional perspective … the appearance rather than the fact of conformity is often presumed to be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy”. Similarly, Meyer and Rowan (1977: 349) suggested that through formal and symbolic steps “an organization demonstrates that it is acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner”. From their perspective, external evaluators can maintain stability and public confidence by disclosing inconsistencies. Institutional theorists contend that organizations

facing conflicting, inconsistent demands about what practices they ought to use can maintain legitimacy by adapting designs that mask attention to controversial core activities that may be unacceptable to some constituents. Organizations that adapt a new model for purely symbolic purposes with a view to gaining legitimacy may stop using it or may not progress beyond a very superficial use if through withdrawal of good faith the mechanism has lost its symbolic value, Symbolic compliance may be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy and survival" (Jenniskens & Morphew, 1999: 110).

Looking at the issue of quality management through a neo-institutional lens has also inspired a number of empirical studies in the field of higher education. Several researchers have used notions of accepted norms and beliefs, for instance of symbolic compliance as sufficient means for the attainment of legitimacy and survival, and of isomorphism in order to examine organizational change in higher education (Palmer, 1977: 346). So, for example, Csizmadia (2006: 40), having studied the introduction of quality management in Hungarian education, claims that implemented management techniques (i.e. a quality improvement programme) may help higher education institutions to manage the impression that outsiders have about them, even if they exist more on paper than in practice. His empirical evidence supports the idea that general organizational theories are highly relevant in explaining quality assurance implementation in higher education institutions. He suggests that there is a need to study the entire process of quality assurance implementation (institutionalization) and not only the outcomes. Quality assurance implementation as an outcome that is observed only over a short time hides many of the dynamic processes that should interest policy-makers, experts and academics. Csizmadia also discusses how various fads, particularly quality mechanisms in higher education, failed and became de-institutionalized. Furthermore, his study revealed much symbolic compliance. He argues that normative isomorphism was probably introduced through external consultancy and that it played an important role in the institutionalization process as well as in protecting universities' legitimacy. In addition, his study revealed that organizational characteristics, such as leaders' commitment to quality management, institutional reputation, and bureaucratic and political decision-making processes, as well as inclusion of external consultants, matter for the organizational responses to quality management in Hungarian higher education (Csizmadia, Enders & Westerheijden, 2008).

From a neo-institutional perspective, an organization's adoption of policies and programmes is constrained by rules, requirements and values shared by its members on what constitutes appropriate organizational forms and behaviour. Csizmadia, Enders & Westerheijden, 2008 analyzed the opinions of Portuguese university rectors and academics on quality assessment systems and their consequence at the institutional level. They maintain that academic values and norms are supposed to be better established in older universities than in newly established institutions. Therefore, it is expected that the former will be less open to the implementation of quality assessment processes than the latter (Rosa et al. 2006: 148). Additionally, they claim that some structures and activities related to quality assessment are more frequently implemented in new universities than in classical ones. Rosa et al. (2006:149) further discuss how new universities have been more adaptable to the environment than traditional universities by trying to dominate market niches related to local or regional demands in order to escape competition from traditional universities and being more open to integrating outside stakeholders into governing bodies. This is also reflected in the finding that rectors from new universities have a more positive view of the self evaluation process.

As stated by EQUIP (2008: 32), in Ethiopia the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) and institutional quality assurance units were established to safeguard the quality of higher education institutions. Quality assurance policy, manuals, guidelines and quality standards were formulated; national and institutional quality assurance experts, institutional quality assurance directors and reviewers were trained. However, there is a gap between what was designed into and expected of the quality assurance system. The success of the QA system may be dependent less on the rigorous application or the neatness of the dry documented quality assurance system and more on its contingent use by actors, and how they view and interpret the quality assurance system (Newton, 2001: 43). The studies conducted by UNESCO (2006), HERQA and HESC (2007: 21) indicate that the adequacy of the practices of the quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions is questionable and seemingly achieves only symbolic compliance.

Therefore, the established quality assurance mechanisms and the development of QA policy and guidelines alone may not help higher education institutions to manage the impression

that the outsiders have about them, even if they exist more on paper than in practice. Thus, a higher education institution can satisfy external demands for increased accountability to stakeholders by actually adopting and genuinely implementing the mechanisms that address their interests. If that is the case, the implementation of the established quality assurance mechanisms in Ethiopian higher education institutions can be seen as "symbolically mediated". The central theme of the current study is to interpret whether HEIs implement quality assurance mechanisms and if so, to what extent and in what way. The study also aims to investigate the adequacy of quality assurance mechanisms implemented in HEIs. The adequacy of quality assurance is connected to neo-institutional theory, namely to the question whether QA systems work symbolically or literally in HEIs.

2.11.3. Decision making process

Stensaker (2004: 223) emphasized that internal power and interests are vital in understanding how a higher education institution responds to external pressures. Self-interest and power relations infused the whole process, where powerful groups within the organization used their power to enforce institutional compliance when their interests were at stake. Research on decision making lends much support to the previous view. Mintzberg (1983: 124) emphasizes that organizational behavior is a power game in which various players seek to control the organization's decisions and actions. Different players try to use their own levels of power to control decisions and actions. According to this model, to understand the behavior of the organization, it is necessary to understand which players or influencers are present, what needs each seeks to fulfill in the organization, and how each is able to exercise power to fulfill them.

Building on such insights, Allison (1971) developed conceptual models, here labeled the Organizational Process Model (OPM) and the Bureaucratic Politics, .Bureaucratic process Model (BPM), which together provides a basis for an improved explanation and prediction of organizational decision making. According to OPM the outputs of large organizations function according to certain regular patterns of behavior from which actions emerge. BPM focuses on the internal politics of an organization

2.11.3.1. Bureaucratic Politics Model

Organizational staff members do not constitute a monolithic group. Rather, all persons are, in their own right, players in a competitive game (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 297). The name of the game is bureaucratic politics: bargaining along regularized channels among staff members positioned hierarchically within an organization. Thus, organizational behaviour can be understood according to this model as the outcomes of bargaining games among individuals.

Individuals become players in an organization by occupying a position for producing decisions on organizational issues. The positions define “what players both may and must do” (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 297). However, the decisions depend not only upon the position, but also upon the player who occupies it. As Allison and Zelikow (1999: 298) emphasise, personality, each player’s basic operating style, and the complementarity or contradictions among personalities and style, in the inner circles are irreducible pieces of the policy blend. Then, too, individuals bring their own mind-sets to their job in determining sensitivities and debts to certain issues, personal standing with and commitments to various issues. Games are played to determine organizational decisions and actions but they advance and impede the players’ conception of the organization’s interest, operational objectives, specific programmes to which they are committed, and other personal concerns. These overlapping interests constitute the stakes for which, to what extent, how, and with which means games are played. As Allison and Zelikow (1999: 299) notice, stakes are the mix of individual interests shaped by the issue at hand. In the light of these stakes, a player decides on a stand on the issue. Turning to my case, the quality assurance literature emphasizes the role of leaders, especially that their commitment is essential for organizational success in implementing quality assurance mechanisms. Leaders can support and legitimize the implementation because they have authority to allocate resources. Cerych and Sabatier (1986) also stress the importance of leaders being committed to the implementation. Further, Dill (1995) notes that quality must become the responsibility of all academics, but he also emphasises the need for strong and committed leadership to make that happen

In addition, Allison (1971:51) and Oliver (1997: 123) point out that organizations seek out blueprints or recipes by using outside consultants to develop their expertise. Specific to higher education, Birnbaum (2000: 213) emphasizes that leaders in higher education institutions are often unable to decide independently how to adopt or develop a quality assurance mechanism. Although these quality assurance experts may have less experience in the area of higher education, they may still be able to help avoid pitfalls based on their experience with quality management outside higher education and in this way to increase the pace, scope and adequacy of quality assurance implementation. In sum, quality assurance implementation usually requires leaders who are committed to the issue, provide the necessary resources, and negotiate between the various interests inside an organization and between the organization and its environment. External experts can help to increase effectiveness and efficiency in this process.

In sum, quality management implementation usually requires leaders who are committed to the issue and provide the necessary resources and negotiate between the various interests inside an organization, and between the organization and its environment. External experts can help to increase effectiveness and efficiency in this process.

The players' ability to play successfully depends also upon their power. The power of decision makers is an "elusive blend of at least three elements": bargaining advantages (drawn from formal authority and obligations, internal or external backing, constituents, information, expertise and status), skill and will in using bargaining advantages, and other players' perceptions of the first two components (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 301). Power wisely invested yields an enhanced reputation, which can be depleted by unsuccessful investment. Thus each player "must pick the issues on which he can play with a high probability of success" (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 300). However, no player's power is

Sufficient to guarantee satisfactory outcomes. Shared power confirms all players' feeling that other players do not see the first player's problem—surely not from that player's point of view—and, as Allison and Zelikow (1999 : 303) stated, "others must be persuaded to look at the issue from a less parochial perspective". Organizational decisions thus are made in the context of shared power, with

Separate judgments concerning important choices. This determines that politics is the mechanism of choice. The decisions and actions are intra-organizational political resultants:

resultants in the sense that what happens is not chosen as a solution to a problem but rather results from compromise, conflict, and confusion of [staff members] with diverse interests and unequal influence; political in the sense that the activity from which decisions and actions emerge is best characterized as bargaining along regularized channels among individual members (Allison & Zelikow, 1999 : 294-295).

Thus actions rarely follow from an agreed doctrine in which all players concur. Instead agreement reflects the momentary operational convergence of a mix of motives. All players pull and haul with the power at their discretion for outcomes that advance their conception (Allison & Zelikow, 1031999:296) of organizational interests. Organizational behavior can be considered in several situations as something that emerges from subtle, overlapping bargaining games among organizational members.

2.12. CONCLUSION

The literature review has emphasized that there is no single agreed-upon definition of the concept of quality in higher education. Scholars in the literature identify a number of different definitions. Quality may be context based and it can change over time. For this reason, quality assurance conceptualization also differs; it depends on the definition of quality that is used. Quality assurance in higher education contributes effectively to improving the performance of the economy, raising the academic standards and paying continuous attention to the quality of teaching. There are different approaches to quality assurance; the meaning of the concept may vary depending on the field of activity. Different countries have evolved quality assurance models for their higher education systems as necessitated by their unique national contexts. Nevertheless, in all activities related to quality assurance across the world there is a common unifying thread that ties together the basic concepts. Research indicates that certain conditions must be fulfilled if QA systems are to work successfully in developing countries.

Quality assurance is about putting about an institutions notions of quality in to action .this requires both a clear statement about an institutions concept of quality and shared understanding of that concept amongst institutional stakeholders .

The impact of QA systems varies within various higher education institutions. Studies have shown both negative and positive impact at institutional and departmental levels and many studies are concerned about inter alia the increased workload for academic staff to engage in QA activities, the adequacy of resources for quality activities and the competence of quality reviewers, particularly in developing countries.

This chapter also describes the Overview of the theories that was used in this study. The above discussion emphasized that neo-institutional, resource dependency perspective and decision making process model can be useful in explaining organizational response to external expectations. The resource dependency perspective emphasizes how organizations are externally controlled and how organizational action is to a large extent determine by the dependence on external resources and the exchange relationship in which an organization is involved ,neo-institutional theory focuses on symbolic compliance may be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy and survival and decision making process model reveals the pulling and hauling of various players with different positions, perceptions, priorities and separate and unequal power, focusing on different problems, which yield the outcomes that constitute the action in question.

This section discussed that resource dependency from government will be a major trigger to satisfy governmental demands for organizational change (i.e. quality assurance implementation). This change may, however, be real or symbolic with varying degrees in between and over time. This is where neo-institutional theory makes a contribution. The decision making process model also used as a theoretical framework , the explanatory power of this model is achieved by revealing the pulling and hauling of various players with different positions, perceptions, priorities and separate and unequal power, focusing on different problems, which yield the outcomes that constitute the action in question. Data collection and analysis of the study was conducted within the framework of this theoretical frame work

The next chapter presents the research design and methodology that I used to undertake the study

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In order to reach an intended destination, there are multiple choices, some better than others. For example, a traveller could select to walk on foot, drive a cycle or fly, depending on the distance to be travelled. For everything we do, we have to make choices; the best choice is always that which guarantees the achievement of planned goals (Mhlanga, 2008: 65).

This chapter presents a philosophical basis for the entire study. It discusses the strategies, the design of the study, methods and instruments of data collection, and the most important data analysis techniques that were employed for addressing the research questions raised in Chapter One. The chapter also explains the reasons why the mixed design was considered appropriate, the selection of the cases used in the study, the data collection methods, actions that I took to increase both the validity and reliability of the results, how the data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, and ethical issues relating to research. The chapter has two main parts. Part one explores theoretical orientations related to theoretical perspectives that underpin the pragmatic approach adopted for the present study, a justification to locate this study within the world view of pragmatism and the rationale, both for the selection of case study and survey study approaches. Part two presents the research process/ design and deals with the practical and procedural issues of the study. The overall research design, design components, sources of data, data collection instruments, the participants involved, the study sites and ethical considerations are discussed in detail.

PART I. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

3.2. EPISTEMOLOGY

The term epistemology derives from the Greek word *episteme*, which means knowledge. In a research context, epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge or “how we know what we know” (Lichtman, 2006: 56). Traditionally closely related to epistemology is the

nature of “reality”, more precisely the nature of being or existence; in another way, ontology (Guba, 1990: 17). Some scholars who support a constructivist paradigm claim that there are multiple realities, whilst others claim that there is a single reality. This plurality of perspectives is at the centre of the so called “paradigm wars”. As noted by Bredo (2006: 5), the ongoing debate around different perspectives about the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality has remained diverse and controversial. In reality, there are no common fundamental beliefs.

According to Cohen and Manion (1994), some scholars distinguish between two paradigms, others indicate three, and still other authorities identify more than three paradigms. The three major identified paradigms are positivist/post positivist, constructivist/interpretivist and the emancipator paradigm. Even though these paradigms are philosophically distinct in research; the distinctions are not always precise and clear-cut. For this study pragmatism, which is a blend of interpretivist and positivist paradigms, was used as a theoretical orientation.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are the two kinds of research methods that are extensively used together in educational research. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 14), qualitative research uses naturalistic methods to discover and explore phenomena and seek understanding of processes and meanings. It is designed to provide an in-depth description of specific programmes, practices or settings. In another way, quantitative research employs statistical measures to test hypothetical generalizations. Pragmatism is regarded as the philosophical partner of the mixed-method approach. It provides a set of assumptions about knowledge and enquiry that underpins the mixed approach and distinguishes it from purely quantitative approaches that are based on the philosophy of positivism and purely qualitative approaches that are based on the philosophy of interpretivism. They focus on the areas of compatibility between quantitative and qualitative research, and between positivism and interpretivism. It is an eclectic approach. Creswell & Plano (2007: 25) notes that “a mixed-method approach can provide a fuller description and more complete explanation of the phenomenon being studied by providing more than one perspective on it. By encouraging qualitative and quantitative methods and by facilitating a blend of exploratory and explanatory research,

the findings are likely to address a wide range of the questions relating to 'Why', 'how', 'what' and 'who'".

Since this study aimed to gain deeper understanding and a fuller description of the status and practices of quality assurance systems in Ethiopian HEIs, the interpretive and positivist paradigm of research (Mixed approach) was found to be most appropriate. Data could be obtained through survey questionnaires (quantitative data), interviews and document analysis (qualitative data). Both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered in different phases, but was merged after the separate data collection and analysis of the two approaches. A sequential exploratory strategy was used. Qualitative data collection and analysis were followed by a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis. In this case, the mixing of the two research findings actually merged the qualitative data with the quantitative data during the discussion of the outcomes of the whole study. In order to triangulate the data from interviews, documents and survey questionnaires, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used.

The qualitative approach (or alternate paradigm) was preferred for this study because of the nature of the inquiry that was being undertaken. I intended to source people's ideas and opinions on the quality assurance policies and practices in their institutions. Different people perceive quality and quality assurance systems, as they apply to an educational organization, very differently. In this study, I sought to understand the situation in the studied institutions as it was constructed by the participants, in other words, the product of how people interpret their world. I perceived quality assurance systems as social constructions that are premised on certain social values and are necessarily affected by a multiplicity of factors within a given context. It was necessary to determine how the different players in each studied university "constructed their meaning" regarding the quality assurance arrangements in place in their institutions. Thus, numbers alone would not take me to the bottom of participants' "hearts for me to be able to arrive at … an empathic understanding of the feelings, motives and thoughts behind actors' actions" (Crotty, 1998). Understanding of such quality assurance practices entails understanding the relevant socio-political environments of the studied institutions and this could be best done through talking with the communities of the institutions.

This research framework is adopted from Crotty (1998: 4). It is a useful model for establishing a research framework for this study.

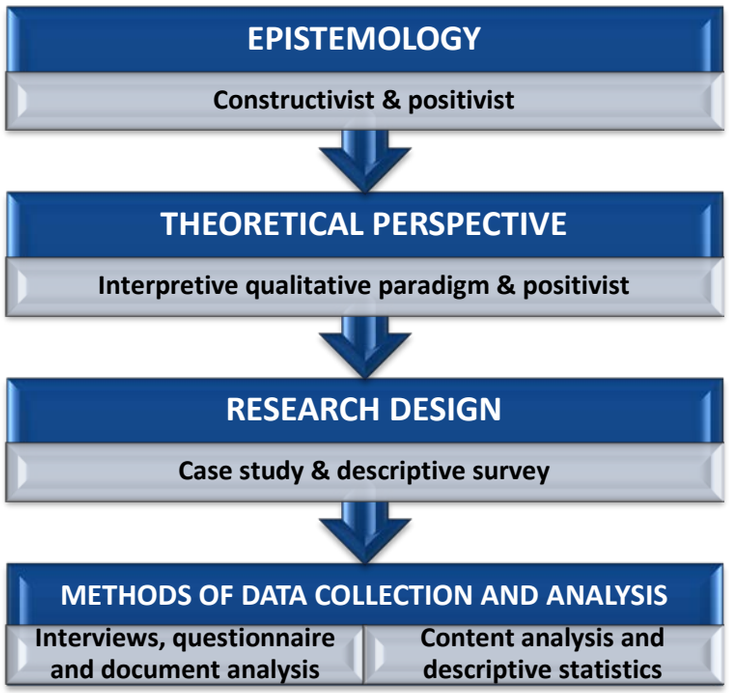


Figure 3.1 Elements of the methodological framework.

Adapted from Crotty (1998) with content adapted to the present research

PART II: METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.3.1. Mixed approach

Mixed-methods research makes use of the pragmatic method and system of philosophy. Mixed-methods research, employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, has gained popularity because research methodology continues to evolve and develop, and a mixed method is another step forward, utilizing the strength of both qualitative and qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2009: 105). As a methodology, mixed methods (MM) provide a means to facilitate and explain several complex phenomena across various disciplines. Creswell (2009: 106)

notes that “the field of mixed methods will continue to expand across disciplines and [throughout the] field”. Additionally, Tashakkori and Creswell (2008: 5), along with many other scholars, argue for the use of MM (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Greene, 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009); thus, in varying degrees, all of them advocate the empowerment of the next generation of researchers to examine issues and research problems from multiple perspectives.

A mixed-methods strategy is defined as research in which the researcher collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study or programme of inquiry (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007: 4). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003: 35) suggest that a variety of data sources and analyses is needed to thoroughly understand complex social phenomena or realities. In addition, Currall and Towlers (cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003: 513) mention that

> *...when organizational and management researchers used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate organizational phenomena, their research yielded greater information than could be achieved through single methods...[They] advocated that quantitative and qualitative research methods are complementary rather than opposed approaches: thus, this combination of techniques can enhance and enrich current knowledge by filling the gap that other studies, which only adopt a single approach, are unable to do.*

As noted by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:15), “its logic of inquiry includes the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypothesis), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results)”. Because of its logical and intuitive appeal, providing a bridge between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, an increasing number of researchers are utilizing mixed-methods research to undertake their studies (Creswell and Plano, 2003: 463-65) Mixed-method strategies can be classified into several typologies. A priority for one type depends on the interest of the researcher, the audience for the study and what the researcher seeks to emphasize in the study. In practical terms, weight occurs in a mixed-

methods study through such strategies as whether quantitative or qualitative information is emphasized first, the extent of treatment of one type of data or the other in the project, or the use of primarily an inductive approach (i.e. generating themes in qualitative) or deductive approach (i.e. testing a theory). Sometimes the researcher intentionally uses one form of data in a supportive role to a larger study (Rogers et al., 2003).

> *Mixing the data (in a larger sense, mixing the research questions and philosophy, the interpretation) is difficult at best (when one consists of text and images and quantitative data, numbers)'. There are two different questions here. When does a researcher mix in a mixed methods study? And how does mixing occur? The first question is much easier to answer than the second. Mixing of the two types of data might occur at several stages: at (1) the data collection, (2) the data analysis, (3) interpretation, or at all three phases. How the data is mixed has received considerable recent attention. (Creswell & Plano & Clark, 2003: 482)*

Mixing means either that the qualitative and quantitative data is actually merged on one end of the continuum, or combined in some way between these two extremes. The two data bases might be kept separate but connected. In mixed-methods research, a blending of quantitative and qualitative research occurs between the data collection of the first phase of research and the data analysis of the second phase. In another study, the researcher might collect both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently and integrate or merge the two databases by transforming the qualitative themes into counts and comparing these counts with descriptive quantitative data. In this case, the mixing consists of integrating the two databases by actually merging the quantitative data with the qualitative data. The MM strategy seemed the most appropriate methodology for this study. The qualitative research approach was prioritised because it represented the major aspects of data collection and analysis in the study, focusing on in-depth explanation of qualitative results. Smaller quantitative components were included in the study. The results of the two phases were integrated during the discussion of the outcomes of the whole study. In order to investigate the practices of quality assurance system in HEIs, a descriptive quantitative survey research method and comparative case study approach were used. Two public and two private higher education institutions were selected for

qualitative and quantitative data, where copious data was acquired through interviews, and analysis of organizational documents. In addition, I also used a descriptive survey design to gather background information and other main data from the sample from higher education institutions by using a survey questionnaire.

The mixed-methods strategy appears to be the most appropriate methodology for this study, given the purposes of the research, the research questions and the conditions in which this study took place. Researchers have found that mixed-methods research is often the best way to address the complex research questions in which I am currently interested (Plano & Clark, 2005: 23). Mixed-methods research is characterized as “an emerging methodology”, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007: 465), who point out that this method, appears to reflect an opening for many quantitative researchers to use qualitative data. In addition, the review of Currall and Towler (2003: 520) suggests that “mixed methods are considered appropriate when research questions concern processes and dynamic phenomena such as innovation and change”. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003: 87) contend that when qualitative and quantitative methods are used in combination, they harmonize with each other and allow for analysis that is more complete. Green (2007: 3) viewed fifty-seven method studies to identify five purposes for adopting mixed-methods design strategies: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion. Creswell (2003: 8) argues that a mixed method is a strategy for collecting, analyzing and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data at some stages of the research process within a single study in order to understand a research problem more completely.

Therefore, my study of the quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions employed various research techniques and data collection methods in order to move as close as possible to the core of the problem, namely quality assurance practices in higher education institutions. I employed a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyse data, integrate the findings, and draw inferences by using both qualitative and quantitative modes in this single study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007: 4). To extend the discussion regarding the mixed-methods research strategy, Creswell et al. (2003: 226) point out those mixed-methods researchers can make decisions about four factors to

select a particular research strategy: implementation, priority, integration and theoretical perspective. According to Creswell (2003),

> *(1) Implementation: refers either to quantitative or qualitative data collection and analysis in phase (sequential) or concurrently (data collection at the same time), (2) Priority: refers to whether greater weight is given to qualitative or quantitative approach. A priority for one type of data or the other depends on the interests of the researcher and what he seeks to emphasize, (3) Integration: refers to when the researcher mixes the data and is the phase in the research process where the connecting or mixing of the qualitative and quantitative data occurs .*

For this study, an explanatory sequential design was employed. Qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis was conducted at different phases. The process is depicted by the following figure.

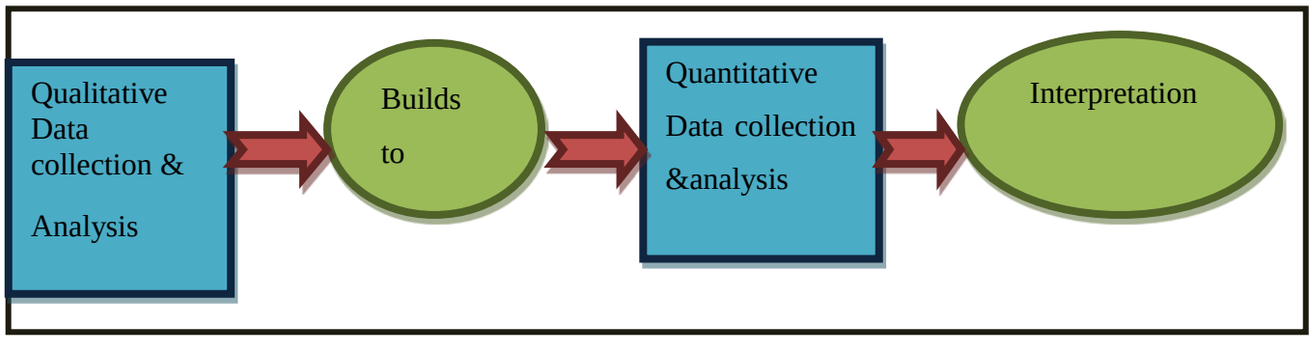


Figure 3.2 Explanatory sequential research designs

Adopted from Johnson (2007) cited in Angell & Townsend (2011)

These decisions underlie the choices of specific approaches, techniques, and interpretive frames I used to collect and analyse data from multiple sources (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003: 373). As indicated in Figure 3.2 above, even though data analysis in qualitative research starts at the initial stage of data collection, for this study, qualitative data collection through interview and document review and an intensive data analysis followed one after the other. Similarly, the quantitative data collection and analysis also happened at different phases.

3.3.2. Rationale for the mixed approach

Five purposes for mixing quantitative and qualitative data are identified by Greene and Graham (1989): triangulation (quantitative findings are compared to the qualitative results); complementarities (results from one analysis type [e.g., qualitative] are interpreted to enhance, expand, illustrate, or clarify findings derived from the other strand [quantitative]); development (data is collected sequentially and the findings from one analysis type are used to inform data collected and analyzed using the other analysis type); initiation (contradictions or paradoxes that might reframe the research question are identified), and expansion (quantitative and qualitative analyses are used to expand the study's scope). From the aforementioned purposes, this study used a mixed approach for triangulation, complementarities and expansions because public and private higher education institutions involved in quality assurance practices have different experiences and are at different stages. Therefore, there is a need to investigate and describe the experience of key actors involved in the development, implementation and review of the new system of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education system. The most effective way of doing this is by focusing on carefully chosen public and private higher education institutions that might reveal some general trends in spite of their institutional uniqueness. For this kind of exploratory study, a mixed approach is deemed appropriate. The system of external and internal quality assurance is also new for HEIs; at the national level, top management of HEIs, academic staff, external and internal quality reviewers and QA coordinators have different views on the implementation of the system. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from top management of HEIs, academic staff, QA directors and QA experts (NQAA). This helped me to compare the qualitative with quantitative findings, expand the scope of the study by interpreting views emerging from different respondents, support the result from the qualitative analysis with those from the quantitative analysis, and help to draw conclusions from both kinds of data.

3.4. RESEARCH METHODS

This step is the most important part of the research process. This is when decisions are made about what type of research will be conducted, how the research will be executed, how respondents will be approached, as well as when, where and how the research will be completed and details of the research laid down for execution. Based on the researcher’s

methodological orientation, certain methods of data collection will be chosen, and sampling procedures will be selected. Hence, this step is considered as a central position in a research process (Sarantakos, 1997: 102). Overall, it presents the structure for the procedure that the researcher follows, the type of research methods, the selection of research participants, selection of research instruments, sampling procedure and the data analysis that the researcher plans to conduct. Simply put, research design is planning (Leedy, 2001; Creswell, 2009; & Peter, 2003).

3.4.1. The case study approach

Case study can be used in both quantitative and qualitative research. It involves studying individual cases in their natural environment and uses different methods of data collection and analysis. It also investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context (Yin, 2009: 23). As stated by Berger et al. (1989 and 1994), case studies are employed more in qualitative research than quantitative research. Bauer (1994: 38-45) further explains that [c]ase studies are employed for the following reasons: to get more information about the structure, process and complexity of the research project when relevant information is not available or sufficient; to facilitate conceptualization; to assist with formulating hypothesis; to guide the process of operationalization of the variables and to illustrate, explain, offer more detail or expand quantitative findings.

In a case study the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon (the case) bounded by time and activity (e.g. programme, event, institution) and collects detailed information through a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Yin, 2009: 19). Case study research allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues. It can be considered a robust research method, particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. The role of case study method in research becomes more prominent when applied to issues regarding education. By including both quantitative and qualitative data, case study helps explain both the process and outcome of phenomena through analysis of the case under investigation (Kubat, 2006: 21). Yin (1984: 211) notes that there are several categories of case studies, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. Descriptive and explanatory case studies are the most appropriate for this project, because descriptive case studies set out to describe, in narrative form, the natural phenomena which occur within

the data in question, for instance the research questions which were focused on the differences between public and private HEIs in practising QA systems, the impact of QA system on HEIs, and the commitment of managers to implement QA systems. Furthermore, research questions regarding the major factors that influence the implementation of QA systems and the nature of internal and external QA system needed explanatory case studies.

This study employed the comparative case study approach because of the contextual nature of the phenomenon that I was investigating, to allow for cross-comparison of the practices of QA systems, the commitment of top managers and the impact of the system within the public and private HEIs, and to investigate factors influencing quality assurance systems in both HEIs in depth.

The strength of using the case study approach lay in its ability to allow in-depth analysis of the complex relationship that prevails between the quality assurance systems in place and how actors perceive them. The case study approach also allowed me to gain an appreciation of how different contexts influence quality assurance practices in institutions within Ethiopia. Thus, the case study approach gave me the opportunity to link particular forms of quality assurance practice to particular contextual factors and to institutional identities. The practical investigation was conducted by means of a case study in which the main data-gathering tool was a series of semi-structured interview questions with key informants in management positions in selected higher education institutions. This is one of the strategies for qualitative research which I chose (as a main instrument of data collection) to use due to the nature of the study.

3.4.2. Descriptive research method

Survey design provides a quantitative or numerical description of trends, attitudes or opinions of the population by studying a sample of that population. Inferences are made about some characteristics, attitudes or behaviour of the population. A survey study, referred to as a descriptive study, determines and describes the way things are. Typically, survey studies are concerned with assessing attitudes, opinions, procedures and practices (Creswell 2009, 146). Creswell (2003:154) mentions that one of the reasons for using the survey technique is that surveys in principle allow for generalization of findings and thus foster a better understanding of the larger population from which the sample was initially selected. The purpose of survey

research is to generalize from a sample to a population, so that inferences can be made about some characteristics, attitudes or behaviours of this population. The basic purpose of the survey in this study was to gather background information of the case institutions and research participants, the view of academic staff on major QA activities, and factors that influence the implementation of QA systems in both HEIs and at national level. The main themes of the written questionnaire addressed some general characteristics of the higher education institutions (e.g. the establishment of institutional QA manual or guidelines), major QA activities such as curriculum design, approval and revision, students' academic performance assessment, research and publication and factors that influence the implementation of QA systems. The survey was designed to collect data from sample higher education institutions in Ethiopia. The population of the survey consisted of public and private universities. The targeted participants were the faculty quality assurance coordinators, head of departments and senior academic staff of these higher education institutions. I targeted these particular participants in the higher education institutions to ensure that they had the required general institutional knowledge, and more specifically, knowledge on quality management.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTS

3.5.1. Selection of samples

As stated by Creswell (1998:17), sampling is important in both qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative researchers generally use probability and qualitative researchers employ purposive sampling. The principle of sample selection is that researchers must consider the overall validity of the research design and the sampling plan and parameters should line up with the purpose and the questions of the study. (Johnson, 1990 & Huberman, 1994) stated that:

> *Purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in qualitative study,*
> *because researchers bring their values, biases and understandings to their project. The participant selection must be individuals who either have experienced the phenomena being explored or can articulate their conscious experience or have taken an action or have participated in a process that is*

central to the study (Huber man, 1994 & Creswell, 1998). Morgan (2000: 88) recommends that researchers select as many as ten individuals in the process of collecting data for primarily in-depth interview of case studies.

For this study, both purposive and random sampling procedures were used for qualitative and quantitative methods respectively. In Ethiopia, there are nine old (established before 1998) public universities and six recently accredited private university colleges. Higher education in Ethiopia comprises many universities with different characteristics, size, complexity and academic specialization. For this reason, the selection of sample HEIs was made by purposive sampling to evaluate and explain the organizational response to governmental expectations in terms of quality assurance. Four higher education institutions were selected as a sample with sufficient characteristics to fit the requirements of the research design. Accordingly, two public universities (one university with undergraduate, Masters and PhD programmes and one university with only undergraduate programmes) and two accredited private universities (with undergraduate programmes) were selected as a sample of study, i.e. Jimma University from the west, Hawassa University from the south and St Mary's and Admas University Colleges from the centre, because they have richer experience in practicing quality assurance and accreditation systems in their institutions than other HEIs. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998: 211). Therefore, I used a purposive sampling strategy in selecting the sample HEIs and the interview participants in the study as an information-rich source from which I could learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the study. In addition to purposive sampling, random sampling techniques were also used to select sample faculties, programmes, programme leaders, and senior instructors. The respondents (population) of this study were HERQA experts, higher education institution vice presidents, university quality assurance directors, research and publication directors, faculty deans, department heads, faculty QA coordinators and senior instructors. Participants in the interview were selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience as well as their relevant responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and accreditation practices as they were managers of education quality at different levels in HEIs. Most researchers believe that using multiple sources of evidence to build a triangulated data source is a significant principle

in data collection, “Triangulation of data collection methods reduces the risk that conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitation of a single method” (Maxwell, 1996: 210). Patton (2002: 21) suggests that researchers adopt triangulation of data sources to collect information from multiple sources, but aim at corroborating the same fact, because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon.

To triangulate the data in this study, I collected the data linked to the same research sub-questions from government or institutional documents, interviews and questionnaires. This triangulation of data sources supported me in developing and identifying findings, and improving the validity and reliability of the study. The multiple sources of data also allowed me to validate and cross-check findings.

3.5.2. INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

In a mixed-methods design, as adopted in many social and management studies, the data collection instruments and analysis techniques come from both qualitative and quantitative traditions, “The collection and analysis proceeds in either a parallel [QUAL +QUAN] and [QUAN +QUAL] or sequential manner [QUAL/QUAN] and [QUAN /QUAL]” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003: 77). In this study, I used a sequential exploratory strategy to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data collection and analysis followed the second phase, namely quantitative data collection and analysis. Weight is generally placed on the first phase. The methods of data gathering I used were interviews, and document analysis followed by survey questionnaires.

3.5.2.1. Documentary review

One of the most important instruments to collect research data for this study was the analysis of documents that mostly focused on national and institutional QA frameworks, guidelines and quality assurance standards, self-assessment reports, external quality audit reports, as well as minutes of QA committees. Documents are rich sources of data in social research. As Denzin (1988: 67) argues, documentary data may be collected in conjunction with interviews. Documents can be important in triangulation where an intersecting set of different data types is used in a single project (Mason, 2002: 53). In research, the use of documents does not inherently involve researchers in social interactions as do interviewing and observation.

Thus, researchers in document data collection must ask themselves about what they expect from the document data and about the principles that deal with selectivity and perspective in their handling of documents. “An important means of increasing the available information for comparison is to utilize document analysis or the re-analysis of data collected for other purposes” (Hakim, 1982: 64).In qualitative research, the researcher identifies and interprets information contained in the documents, and ascertains aspects of the issue in question and the main ideas, statements and thoughts on the subject (Hakim, 1982: 64).

In this study, a number of data sources developed and used by the institution during the implementation of quality assurance were consulted in the form of documentation, records, journals and articles. This includes the following: the national and institutional quality assurance frameworks, manuals and guidelines; institutional self-assessment reports; external quality audit reports; standards and procedures used by HEIs to ensure their quality education; institutional documents on quality education and accreditation and journals and articles published on quality audits. For this study, data from the document sources of the case study HEI’s was collected through a search of the websites and hard and soft copies taken directly from the institutions. The most common key words or themes taken from the documents of all case study institutions were definition of quality and quality assurance, the introduction of quality assurance systems, internal quality audit (self-assessment), external quality audit, internal QA structures, accreditation, students’ academic assessment, curriculum development, approval and revision, graduates survey, research and publication, and so on. Themes were merged and organized in the form of phrases, statements and paragraphs that respond to specific questions.

These key words or themes or paragraphs represent categories of the documents expected and needed, and are consistent in this case study. These documentary sources were triangulated with other sources with interviews and survey data. The interpretation and analysis of these sources was integrated within the interpretation of sources from interviews. According to Krippendorff (1980: 7), content analysis is one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences, which seek to understand data not as a collection of physical events but as symbolic phenomena and to approach their analysis unobtrusively. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 23) state that documents are easily analyzed and are a stable

source of rich information. Documents such as newspapers, minutes of meetings, and personal journals are valuable sources of information in qualitative and quantitative research. I employed content analysis to investigate self-evaluation documents, external quality review, journals, articles, strategic plans and QA manuals /guidelines. To analyze these sources I followed suggestions on content analysis. The analysis involved finding statements about facts (the way the internal QA system was introduced, internal and external quality audit systems, accreditation, on major activities covered in internal QA systems, contents of the manuals, standards set) or opinions (of internal and external evaluators).

3.5.2.2. Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire is one of the most important tools of many of those engaged in research. Questionnaires can be very detailed; covering many subjects and issues, and can be designed and used to collect data in structured and manageable form. When the researcher wants to collect data quickly or easily from people in a non-threatening manner, s/he uses survey questionnaires. Most of the time questionnaires are viewed as an objective research tool that can produce generalizable results because of large sample size. A wide range of participants can respond to it (Moret, 2009: 2).

In each of the four cases in this study, documentary analysis and interviews were immediately followed by a survey targeted at faculty QA coordinators, heads of department and other senior academic staff. The survey was primarily meant to provide baseline data on what prevailed at institutions in terms of quality assurance and what opinions academic staff held on the subject. The survey instrument comprised more closed-ended and very few open-ended questions. From the four universities, ten faculties, and three departments from each faculty were included in the sample. These ten faculties from the case study HEIs and several departments were randomly selected. In all four cases, faculty QA coordinators and heads of departments were targeted, over and above other academic staffs that were randomly sampled from the same academic units. From four case study institutions, questionnaires were distributed for 120 participants comprising 12 Faculty QA coordinators, 36 department heads and 72 senior academic staff. From these, 94 questionnaires (78.3%) were returned, i.e. 11 faculty QA coordinators, 27 department heads and 56 senior lecturers.

Significantly, all the different levels were represented in the returned questionnaires. In addition, a survey questionnaire addressed the following basic research questions:

What are the major activities internal quality assurance processes coves in Ethiopian HEIs?

What are the major factors that influence the effective implementation of internal and external quality assurance systems at national and institutional levels?

Many items commonly used in questionnaires include scaled items, ranked items and free response items. For this study I used both closed ended and open-ended questions. I collected a wide range of information from faculty QA coordinators, department heads, and instructors of public and private universities about the major activities covered by internal QA processes (curriculum design and revision, mechanisms used to insure the quality of teaching and learning processes for ensuring the quality of research and factors influencing the current practices of quality assurance systems). Furthermore, questionnaires were checked for completeness and usefulness of all essential information. Questions not answered by respondents were treated as missing data and were excluded from the analysis. They were reported as a percentage of the total number of participants. The results were intended to complement the respective qualitative themes, rather than presenting them as stand-alone quantitative analysis.

3.5.2.3. Interview

As described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992: 96), the interview is a purposeful conversation between two people with the aim of getting information. It is used to gather qualitative descriptive data in the subject's own words. The interview is more commonly used in qualitative research. It is an interactional exchange of thoughts and opinions and could be a one-on-one interview or large-group interview (Henning, 2004: 1998). Henning believes that the main aim of an interview is to find out what individuals think, feel and do and what they have to say. The interview looks at what people have to say about their feelings, experience and thoughts.

The kind of data I needed for this study was mainly qualitative, i.e. data based on how individuals interpreted and constructed reality in their specific contexts. It was on the basis of such interpreted data that I reinterpreted the reality that existed in HEIs, i.e. the nature of quality assurance practices in the case study institutions. In a qualitative study, the researcher is interested not only in the physical events and behaviour taking place, but also in how participants in the study make sense of these, and how their understandings influence their behaviour. This is what made interviews central to my study to understand respondents perspectives of their reality (Maxwell, 1997& Beckman, 1976).

In this study, interviews were considered the most appropriate method of data collection because of the nature of the data needed in order to address the question that I wanted to investigate, i.e. the nature of quality assurance practices in higher education institutions. I used an open-ended interview in which I could ask participants about the facts of as well as their opinions about practices. A major purpose of this interview was to corroborate certain facts collected through document review and to obtain more data from different participants around the same themes. The interview process begins with finding the respondents and setting up the interviews in accordance with the overall research design. The researcher needs to conduct and record the interview and to take notes or analyze and interpret data. The analysis of interview data commences once interviews have been fully transcribed. In this research the main problem I investigated was the status and practices of QA systems in Ethiopian HEIs. In an interview conducted with the research participants, I explained the research purpose and clarified what I wanted to investigate and why, as well as the types of information I needed from them. Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with HERQA experts and HEI managers in two public and two private HEIs. The views and opinions of these people helped to show the extent to which individuals in an institution hold common or diverse perceptions on quality assurance practices, and the extent to which they were committed to implementing the systems. These interview participants were selected on the basis of their leadership roles in the implementation of quality assurance systems in their respected institutions.

The focus of these individual semi-structured interviews was on the practices of QA system in their respective institutions, how and when they had developed the system, the impact of

the system on different institutional aspects, how it supported the development of the institution, the commitment of managers to implementing the system, and the major quality activities of the institution. Selected interviewees comprised the following: three national quality assurance agency (HERQA) experts, two university academic vice presidents, four university quality assurance directors, four university research and publication directors, nine faculty deans and four faculty QA coordinators. They were responsible for the implementation of all policies and procedures regarding quality assurance systems.

All the interviews occurred in the participants' offices; the dates and timing of interviews were determined by the participants and interviews lasted for a period of an hour. During an interview I made notes in my notebook. I did not use a tape recorder because the issue of quality is sensitive; not all the interview participants allowed me to do so. This study was a qualitative case study which needed qualitative content analysis for the interpretation of the content of the text data through systematic classification and identification of themes or patterns. As stated by Patton (2002: 21), qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. Qualitative content analysis involves processes designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inferences and interpretations (interview participants indicated in appendix E).

The interviews were conducted with appropriate KIs involved in the development, management and review of external (national) and internal (institutional) QA systems in the case study institutions and national QA agencies. I read and re-read the qualitative data collected for this study from interviewees and divided the data into meaningful analytical units (segmenting the data). The narrative data came from a variety of sources, such as top managers of the university (Academic V/presidents, national QA agency experts, QA directors and faculty deans) (indicated in appendix D). Initial themes generated from interview transcripts were listed in the form of single words, phrases and statements. These themes were organized and combined, and related themes categorized by my own descriptive phrases or chosen words and key phrases from the text. Categories were merged both from the data and previous related studies. After main themes emerged from each case

study were identified and analyzed separately (by narrative description), themes that emerged from all case studies and national QA (extracted through interview) and themes from document reviews were brought together in one table for larger categorisation. Ideas /themes that appeared in all case studies were selected and categorized according to the research questions, individual common themes from all case studies were combined together and finally large super categories that combined several categories from more specific categories to larger ideas and concepts were analyzed and interpreted by using quotations and people's ideas and feelings described in a summary format.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves developing a detailed description of each cases .The case description and themes are related to specific activities and situations involved in the case study. Hatch (2002: 148) views data analysis as a systematic search for meaning; it is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, and generate theories. It also involves interpretation, categorization, comparison and finding patterns. Hatch further elaborates that data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. The success of research is very much dependent on the analysis of data; while the analysis of data remains one of the most difficult parts of research. As noted by Creswell and Plano (2007: 128), traditionally data analysis in mixed-methods research consists of analyzing the quantitative data using quantitative methods and the qualitative data using qualitative methods. However, mixed data analyses involves the sequential analysis of one data type, which is referred to as sequential mixed analyses, wherein data that is generated from the initial analysis is then converted into the other data type. For example, a researcher could conduct a qualitative analysis of qualitative data followed by a quantitative analysis of the qualitative codes that emerge from the qualitative analysis and that are transformed to quantitative data. Such conversion of qualitative data into numerical codes that can be analyzed quantitatively (i.e., statistically) is known as quantitizing (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Alternatively, a researcher could conduct a quantitative analysis of quantitative data followed by a qualitative analysis of the quantitative data that emerges from the quantitative analysis and that is

transformed to qualitative data. Such conversion of quantitative data into narrative data that can be analyzed qualitatively is known as qualitizing (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003: 231).

Another important aspect of mixed analyses is the priority or emphasis given to the quantitative analysis component(s) and the qualitative analysis component(s). Either the qualitative and quantitative analysis components can be given approximately equal priority (equal status) or one analysis component can be given significantly higher priority than the other analysis component (dominant status). If the quantitative analysis component is given significantly higher priority, then the analysis essentially is a quantitative-dominant mixed analysis, wherein the analyst adopts a post positivist stance , while believing simultaneously that the inclusion of qualitative data and analysis is likely to increase understanding of the underlying phenomenon (Johnson& Onwuegbuzie ,2007). In contrast, if the qualitative analysis component is given significantly higher priority, then the analysis essentially is a qualitative-dominant mixed analysis, whereby the analyst assumes a constructivist-poststructuralist-critical stance with respect to the mixed analysis process, while believing simultaneously that the inclusion of quantitative data and analysis is likely to provide richer data and interpretations (Johnson , 1997: 283).

For this research, the sequential exploratory strategy of mixed-method design was used to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative design was used as a “main” and quantitative design as a “subsidiary” i.e. in qualitative-dominant mixed analysis. The research centres on the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Qualitative (thematic content analysis) and quantitative (descriptive statistical analysis) were used. The qualitative data collection and analysis was followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. I collected the qualitative data through interviews and document reviews from the case study institutions and the national QA agency. Major themes emerged during the interviews and document reviews were identified for each case study. By using categorical strategies, themes were rearranged in a way that could facilitate better understanding of the research questions and aims of the study. After themes emerging from interviews and documents were identified and categorized according to the basic research questions formulated, interpretation and analysis of themes followed for each case study by using

thematic content analysis before the convergence of the findings from the survey questionnaire.

3.6.1. Coding and categorization

Initially identification of themes was undertaken manually, following Miles and lumberman (1994) method of finding patterns and developing conceptual themes .Miles and lumberman (1994) suggested a set of 13 “tactics” for the generation of meaning from the data , for example,(1) noting pattern and themes ,(2) Seeing plausibility , (3) clustering (conceptual grouping to see connections , (4) figurative grouping of data and so on . In addition to this, I used Gibbs (2002) guideline to follow during iterative reading process. These guidelines are identifying : (1) specific fact , behaviour (what peoples say) ,(2) events , (3) activities, (4) strategies (activities aimed towards the goal), (5) meanings and (6) interaction between peoples . Based on the method suggested by Miles and Huber man (1994) kept in mind , I read each transcript many times . This iterative reading of the transcript helped to make sense of what was said and facilitated in the identification of initial concepts and ideas for possible themes.

By scanning within each data type , looking at differences and similarities , gleaning out underlying and repeated concepts , clustering related concepts and grouping and developing conceptual constructs , I was able to provisionally identified several closely related tentative themes which finally helped me to the identification of major themes in relation to aims and research questions of the study .

In the analysis of data from interviews and documents, three levels of analysis were carried out. First, individual themes were identified and analyzed for each case study institution separately. Second, after case analysis for each case study institution, similar themes were selected from all case study institutions and put in one table for analysis. Third, common themes were identified and analyzed individually for all case studies, and comparisons of cases in line with the research questions made. Before the QUAL and QUAN research findings from each case study institution were merged and compared, data obtained through the survey questionnaire regarding major activities of institutional quality assurance and factors influencing the effective implementation of QA

systems at national and institutional levels were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, using percentages, bar graphs, and pie charts not for each case study institution separately but for all case studies at the same time. Finally, the research findings from case study institutions that were analyzed qualitatively and research findings from the descriptive survey which was analyzed quantitatively were merged, interpreted and compared only for the two research questions, namely *what are the major activities internal quality assurance processes cover in Ethiopian HEIs?* And *what are the major factors that influence the effective implementation of internal and external quality assurance systems at institutional level?* The other four research questions were analyzed qualitatively from the data taken from document reviews and interviews. Throughout the discussion of the data in the sections below, quotations are shown in direct quotation marks and printed in italics, while ideas from respondents are reported in summary form.

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Lawrence (1997: 139), direct involvement of field researchers in the social lives of other people raises many ethical dilemmas. There may be no trust between the researcher and the society. The core of research ethics is to honour and maintain due respect for the integrity of all who participate in the research study. Aldrige and Levine (2001: 123) note that respect for respondents involves three components, which include informed consent, confidentiality and sensitivity. Informed consent involves obtaining permission to participate in the research, with the participants having received all necessary information regarding the study. A researcher also has a moral obligation to uphold the confidentiality of data. S/he has to keep information confidential from others in the field. It is the duty of the researcher to build trust and rapport with the participants and not to become involved; s/he should not force people to take part but encourage them to volunteer spending their time on the research project (Marshal, 1998: 321). In conducting an ethical qualitative and quantitative inquiry, researchers need to think when they ask about private matters or procedures, how they ask it, what they let their interviewee tell them, and whether and how they can guarantee confidentiality and anonymity for the interviewee. The interview should be taped with the knowledge and permission of the participants. A researcher remains accountable for the ethical quality of the inquiry and should take great care as s/he collects data. The researcher has to request to use a site; not to do so will lead to failure in the study. Subjects need to

enter research projects voluntarily and understand the value of the study and the danger and obligations that are involved. The researcher should protect the subjects from any risk. Such an informed consent has to be confirmed by a signature. A researcher needs to treat the subjects with respect and seek their cooperation in the research (Patton, 2002: 457).

In this study, as the researcher I provided information and clarification for research participants about the purposes of the study and how I would assure the confidentiality of the information given by them and also obtained permission from HEIs, HERQA, academic vice presidents, faculty deans, institutional quality assurance directors, department heads and instructors. I kept the information taken from them confidential from others. I also encouraged them to volunteer to participate in the research. This was highlighted to the participants prior to the interview, to guarantee their privacy. The anonymity of all informants was assured. In this final report, no references are made to the participants by name but their job description, position or levels of seniority in the management hierarchy were used during data analysis.

3.7.1. Ethical approval process

Obtaining ethical approval involved the following process. First formal approval to undertake the study in four public and private higher education institutions on quality assurance practices initially received from Ministry of education. Obtaining approval to conduct the study in Hawasa , Jimma , St. Mary and Admass universities obtained directly from each institution. Approval from public institutions was the fastest and easiest, while approval from private higher education institutions was tedious and time consuming because private higher education institutions were not ready to disclose the practices of their institution .It took nearly one month to get the permission from private institutions .

All the prospective participants given research information regarding the nature of the study, the research purpose, the use of research findings, the extent of participant involvement and potential sources of harm that could arise during the research .An invitation for voluntary participation was extended orally .Once an indication of willingness to participate was received , an interview was conducted and questionnaires distributed by face to face contact with the research respondents . The participants also gave the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without any penality or offensive by the researcher. Those participants

filling out and returning the questionnaire implied that they had consented to voluntarily participate.

Participants were informed that all data, gathered during data collection phase, would be kept confidential and stored securely in a place only accessible to the researcher. They were also assured that a participant's identity would not be disclosed

3.8. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

3.8.1. Validity of the study

For an understanding of the meaning of the concepts validity and reliability, it is important to discuss various definitions given by many scholars from different perspectives. In qualitative studies, the concept of validity is explained by a variety of terms. Some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research; at the same time, they have realized the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for their research (winter, 2000: 18). According to Creswell & Miller (2001: 125), researchers' perception of validity in the study and their choice of paradigm affect research validity. As a result, many researchers have developed their own concept of validity and have often generated what they consider to be a more appropriate term. For example, they use terms like quality, rigour and trustworthiness. Stenbacka (2001: 558) states that the issue of validity in qualitative research has not been disregarded. Johnson (1997: 283) puts validity as follows "If the validity or trustworthiness can be maximized or tested, then more 'credible and defensible results' may lead to generalizability which is one of the concepts suggested by Stenbacka (2001) as the structure for both doing and documenting high quality qualitative research". Therefore, the quality/validity of research is related to generalizability of the result.

For Patton (2001: 241), although generalizability is considered as one of the criteria for quality case studies, it depends on the cases selected and studied. According to him, validity in quantitative research is very specific to the test to which it is applied – where triangulation methods are used in qualitative research. Matheson (1988: 13) elaborates, saying triangulation has become an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluate (in order to control) bias and establish valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternative epistemology. For

Patton (2001: 247), “Triangulation” strengthens study by combining methods. This means using several kinds of methods or data, including using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Johnson (1997: 284), three types of validity can be considered in qualitative research: first, descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the account as reported by the qualitative researcher; second, interpretive validity is obtained to the degree that the participants’ viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences are accurately understood and reported by qualitative researchers; third, theoretical validity is obtained to the degree that a theory or theoretical explanation developed from research study fits the data and is, therefore, credible and defensible.

Validity denotes the accuracy, meaningfulness and credibility of the research project as a whole (Tashakkori, 2009: 56). Your research endeavour will be worth your time and effort only to the extent that it allows you to draw meaningful and defensible conclusions from your data. When we consider the validity of a research study, we need to ask two basic questions. First: does the study have sufficient controls to ensure that the conclusions we draw are truly warranted by the data? And second, can we use what we have observed in the research situation to make generalizations about the world beyond that specific situation? (Lawrence, 1997: 32-35)

One of the criticisms of qualitative studies is that they are weak when it comes to validating research data. The challenge for qualitative researchers is how to convince readers that they should believe the results of their study and the conclusions they draw. The current study was planned in such a way that I used multiple sources of evidence to maintain the validity of the research. Data on particular aspects under investigation was gathered using more than one method (triangulation of data) so that there were converging lines of inquiry. Such convergence of evidence by engaging multiple methods formed an important aspect of data triangulation in the study. With the use of triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity in this research can also be addressed, because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. To give an example of such data triangulation in the study, one of the quality issues I investigated was the major activities covered by internal QA systems in higher education institutions. To get evidence on this issue, I reviewed self-evaluation reports; conducted

interviews with the top management of HEIs, reviewed external quality audit documents and collected data on the same aspect through survey questionnaires.

Therefore, the validity of this research is maintained by using triangulation – multiple sources of data and multiple research methods were employed in the hope that they would all converge to support a particular theory. I conducted in-depth interview, document review and used survey questionnaires and then looked for common themes that appear in the data gathered from the three instruments. In addition, to guarantee the validity of the research, I also re-entered the HEIs and collected additional data when interruptions occurred and collected the data under better circumstances, using information-rich informants.

Finally, data on major activities of internal quality review was confirmed from these three different sources. This type of data triangulation was done throughout the study on many other dimensions of quality assurance that I was investigating, for instance ensuring the quality of teaching and learning, quality of curriculum design, approval and curriculum revision, student support systems and research output. As a result of a chain of evidence used on different aspects investigated, I believe that my research results are valid.

3.8.2. Reliability of the study

Although the term “reliability” is a concept used to test or evaluate quantitative research, the idea is most often used in all kinds of research (Eisner, 1991: 58). When reliability is a concept to evaluate quality in quantitative research, it is related to good quality research, while the concept of reliability in a qualitative study has the purpose of generating understanding (Stenbacka, 2001: 559). Lincoln and Guba (1985: 290) state that validity and reliability are two factors that any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing the study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study. This corresponds to the question of how an inquirer can persuade his/her own audiences that the research findings of the inquiry are worth paying attention to. To be more specific with the term reliability in qualitative research, the use of “dependability” in qualitative research corresponds to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 300) emphasize an “inquiry audit” as one measure which might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. This can be used to examine both the process and the product of research for consistency. In the same way, Seal (1990, 20) endorses the concept

of dependability with the concept of consistency or reliability in qualitative research. The consistency of data will be achieved when the steps of the research are verified through examination of such items as raw data, data reduction and process notes.

The requirement of reliability is to make the sample design and selection without bias and to ensure that the participants have sufficient opportunities to describe their experience and inform the researcher of their perspectives (Lewis, 2003: 23). The second requirement is to ensure that the research is as robust as it can be in carrying out interview checks on the quality of data and its interpretation.

Reliability of this study was optimized in the following ways: first, I clearly identified and decided on the research design, procedures and methods of data collection, participants of the study and data analysis methods. These activities guided me to gather adequate information from appropriate respondents. Second, in this study the strategies used to maximize the reliability of the findings were to avoid untrustworthy data and bias on the part of the researcher during data collection and analysis (beliefs did not influence me). And finally, appropriateness of the data collection methods to the research question and the triangulation of the data collected through the various methods maximized the reliability of the research.

3.9. CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the research approach and design. It has explained the theoretical orientation of the study, i.e. the mixed approach (pragmatist paradigm). Even though qualitative and quantitative approaches are the two kinds of research methods used together, this study was based more on a qualitative epistemology that stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. It provided me with very insightful experiences on the use of some of the methodologies associated with the epistemology, especially interviews, survey questionnaires and documentary review (Lincoln, 1998: 3). In addition, the chapter has discussed the research strategy employed in this study, which includes the design of the study, data collection procedures, instruments of data collection and data analysis methods. The study leans more towards a qualitative case study because it is designed to provide an

in-depth description of specific practices and programmes, for instance QA practices, commitment of managers to implementing QA systems, the impact of QA systems and curriculum development and revision processes. In addition to qualitative case study, I used survey design to gain the view of senior academic staff, programme heads and faculty QA coordinators on institutional background, major activities of internal QA systems and factors that influenced the effective implementation of QA systems in higher education institutions. National QA agency senior experts, academic vice presidents, institutional QA directors, research and publication directors and faculty/ college deans participated in an interview and academic staff, programme leaders and faculty QA coordinators also completed questionnaires. Finally, I analyzed the data gathered through interview, document review and questionnaires by using content analysis/ thematic analysis and descriptive statistics respectively.

The next chapter presents the context of the four case studies.

CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS FOR EACH CASE STUDY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore and understand issues and problems relating to the development and implementation of quality assurance systems at national and institutional levels in the context of public and private higher education institutions. Relying on the information collected by means of a survey questionnaire, a semi-structured interview with selected informants and a document review, this chapter provides a background of the case study institutions and an analysis and interpretation of the data drawn from each of them. The chapter begins with the background of the case study institutions, followed by the analysis of the views and opinions of faculty QA coordinators, department heads and senior instructors as expressed in their responses to the questionnaire. The opinions and perceptions expressed in the questionnaire responses provide information about the background of the institutions. Main data about the introduction of QA systems and the preparation of QA manuals or guidelines, core activities covered in internal QA systems and factors that hindered the implementation of internal quality assurance system was further illuminated and supplemented by the views expressed by informants in more in-depth interviews and through the document analysis. In this chapter, I also analyzed and interpret the information gathered from individual case studies through interviews and documents individually for each case study. Finally, the results of the interviews, document analysis and survey questionnaires from individual case studies are combined in Chapter 5.

4.2. QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

The questionnaire proved to be fairly effective as an information gathering tool as it allowed the respondents, all of whom are academic managers at various levels, to reflect on the following: the introduction of QA systems and preparation of QA manuals or guidelines; major activities of internal QA systems (including teaching and learning, curriculum design and revision, students' assessment and research activities); and factors influencing the implementation of QA systems in St. Mary's University College, Hawassa University, Admas University College, and Jimma University. Questionnaires were distributed for 120

respondents comprising 12 faculty QA coordinators, 36 department heads and 72 senior academic staff. From these, 94 questionnaires (78.3%) were returned (11 faculty QA coordinators, 27 department heads and 56 senior lecturers). Significantly, all the different levels are represented in the returned questionnaires. In a survey questionnaire, the following two specific research questions were addressed:

What are the major activities covered by internal quality assurance processes in Ethiopian HEIs?

What are the major factors that influence the effective implementation of internal quality assurance systems at institutional levels?

4.2.1. Survey findings on the development of QA systems, QA manuals, major internal QA activities and factors that influence QA system implementation

The development of an institutional quality manual is a major step in the overall process of quality assurance implementation; in fact, it was an implicit expectation of government that higher education institutions should develop quality manuals. I thus asked institutions to indicate whether they had developed quality manuals at all and if so, in which year.

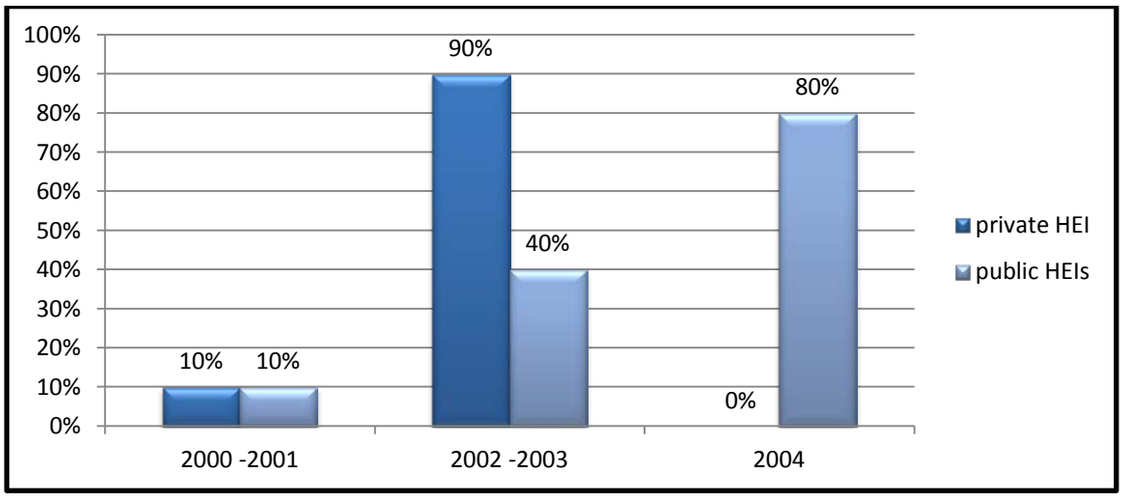


Figure 4.1 Year in which quality manual was developed (in% n = 94)

As shown in Figure 4.1, 80% of the respondents from public institutions in the case study reported that they had developed their QA manual in 2004 EC. At the time when the survey was undertaken, 40% indicated that they had developed their manual between 2002 and

2003 EC academic year and an insignificant number of respondents – 10% – indicated that their institution had developed a QA manual between 2000 and 2001EC. The majority of the respondents from public universities confirmed that public universities, i.e. Hawassa and Jimma, had develop the quality manual in 2004 EC, at the point in time when the survey was undertaken, and the majority of respondents from private university colleges (90%) indicated that their institutions had developed the manual between 2002- 2003 EC. Very few respondents (10%) indicated that their quality manual was developed between 2000 and 2001 EC. The above-mentioned data suggests that private higher education institutions established their quality manuals and responded to government demands faster than public higher education institutions. The public higher education institutions were slow in developing QA manuals to maintain their own quality education.

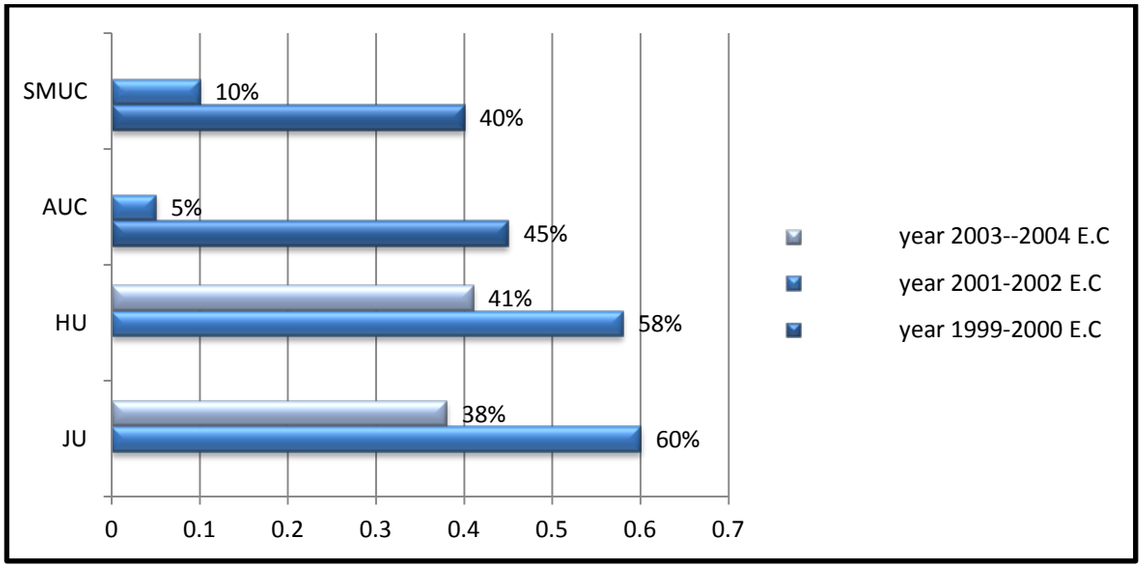


Figure 4.2. Introduction of quality assurance system (in% n = 94)

As indicated in different institutional and national documents, higher education institutions in Ethiopia have the fundamental QA processes and structures in place; however, data from the questionnaires demonstrates that the progress made in this regard is very recent. As depicted in the above graph, respondents were asked when their institutions had introduced quality assurance systems. The majority (60%) and (58%) of respondents from public institutions indicated that QA systems had been introduced to their HEIs between 2001 and 2002 EC while a still significant number of respondents ,i.e. 41% and 38%, from public institutions reported that QA systems had been

introduced between 2003 - 2004 EC. On the other hand, 45% and 40% of respondents from private HEIs reported that they introduced their QA system between 1999 and 2000 EC. An insignificant number of respondents – 10% and 5% –indicated they had introduced QA systems between 2001 and 2002 EC. Others from private university colleges did not respond to the question. Similar to the development of QA manuals, the time of the introduction of QA system differed from institution to institution. The majority of the respondents indicated the QA systems had been introduced to private university colleges between 1999 and 2000 EC. In the public universities, QA systems were introduced from 2001 to 2002. For example, in one of the public universities (Jimma University) a QA system was introduced between 2001 and 2002. This fact shows that even though quality assurance systems were introduced to Ethiopia around 1997 EC, public universities did not follow the formal rule set by the government that had demanded quality assurance systems when they were needed. The introduction of QA systems was relatively faster in private universities than in public universities.

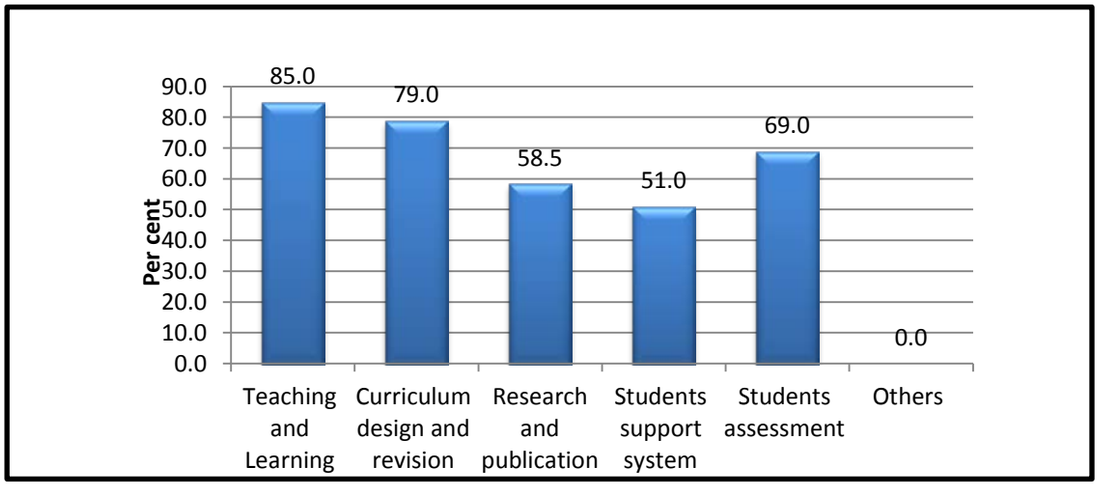
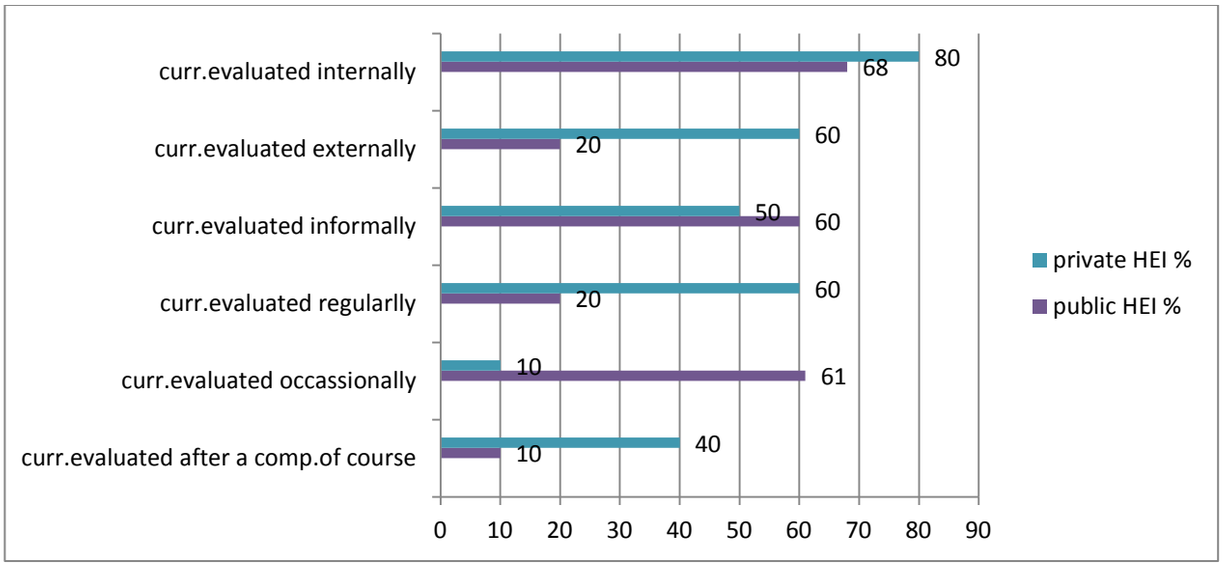


Figure 4.3 Activities covered by institutional quality assurance process

The three groups of respondents from the four case study institutions were asked to rank the major activities their internal quality assurance system covered. As shown on the graph, five internal quality activities were provided as major internal QA activities. Consequently, the perceptions of the respondents towards these issues were discussed. The first internal quality activity, teaching and learning, was reflected by 85% and 10% as “most important”

and “somewhat important” respectively. The second major activity, curriculum design and revision, was reported as “most important” (79%), “important” (15%) and “somewhat important” (5%). The third issue, students’ assessment, was rated by 69% as “most important”. The fourth and fifth major activities, i.e. research and publication, and student support systems, were also supported by 58% and 20% as “most important” and “somewhat important” and 51% as “most important” respectively. Thus 85% of respondents in the survey answered that their internal quality assurance process covered teaching and learning, 79% curriculum design and revision, 69% student’s assessment, 58% research and publication, and 51% student support systems. From the above discussion, we can deduce that the main focus of the institutions’ QA activities was teaching and learning; the second important activity was curriculum design and revision, the third and fourth were students’ assessment and research and publication. The evidence demonstrated that relatively all higher education institutions, both private and public, pay more attention to teaching and learning, curriculum design and students’ assessment in assuring quality than to the other activities of the university. Other activities such as research, and students’ support systems were considered as secondary in their quality assuring process as compare to other major activities. From this we can conclude that internal QA systems in both private and public HEIs focus on similar activities. There were no significant differences observed between public and private HEIs.

Figure 4.4 monitoring the existing curriculum



In most HEIs the curriculum is typically designed by committee or working group. Once a programme is up and running, a variety of processes for monitoring it exists. Most higher education institutions conduct some kind of internal evaluation in addition to an external one. The curriculum should be regularly evaluated and revision of the curriculum should take place at reasonable intervals (DAAD, 2010: 15).

Respondents from case study institutions were asked to rank the processes in place in monitoring their existing curriculum and developing and approving the new curriculum. As indicated in figure 4.4, both public and private HEIs put in place different processes to monitor the existing curricula. As indicated above, in public HEIs the curricula or programmes were evaluated by internal process (68%) and occasionally based on the interest of the instructors (61%) and the curricula were evaluated in an informal way by discussion between staff members and students (60%). In private HEIs the curriculum/programmes are evaluated as part of an external accreditation (60%) and by internal process (80 %), the curricula are evaluated after students' complete one programme (40%) and the curriculum is evaluated informally by discussion between staff members and students (20%).

As indicated by the majority of respondents from private university colleges, in private UC the existing curricula were evaluated by external a creditors (by National QA agency) and internal processes. They also revised their existing curricula after completion of one programme (after graduation of one batch) on a regular bases, whereas in public universities the existing curricula evaluated more by internal processes and sometimes by external evaluators on occasional bases. . Once a programme is up and running, the frequency and means for monitoring it vary from one institution to another. In addition, most institutions seem to conduct a variety of processes in a variety of combinations, leading to the conclusion that there is no one typical process for monitoring the existing curricula in all institutions. From the above data, we can infer that private HEI gave more attention to curriculum evaluation than public HEIs.

The findings suggested that there was a significant gap between public universities and private university colleges in updating their curricula. It seems that private HEIs regularly revise their curriculum because of the pressure exerted on them by the national quality assurance agency, whereas in public higher education institutions the revision of the

curriculum depends on the situation of the department and the institution or the interest of the instructors, because there was no follow-up mechanism on the part of the institutions and national QA agency.

The data gathered from QA directors, Academic vice presidents and college deans through interview indicates that the development and approval of the new curriculum takes place by the committee established for this purpose at department, collage and institutional levels, significant differences were not observed between public and private higher education institutions. Each institution had a working committee established by the institution at institutional, programme and faculty levels. The committee proposes the curriculum and approves the new curriculum or programme. The majority of respondents from both kinds of HEIs reported that the curriculum of higher education institutions is designed by the ministry of education, particularly for law, health and technology courses.

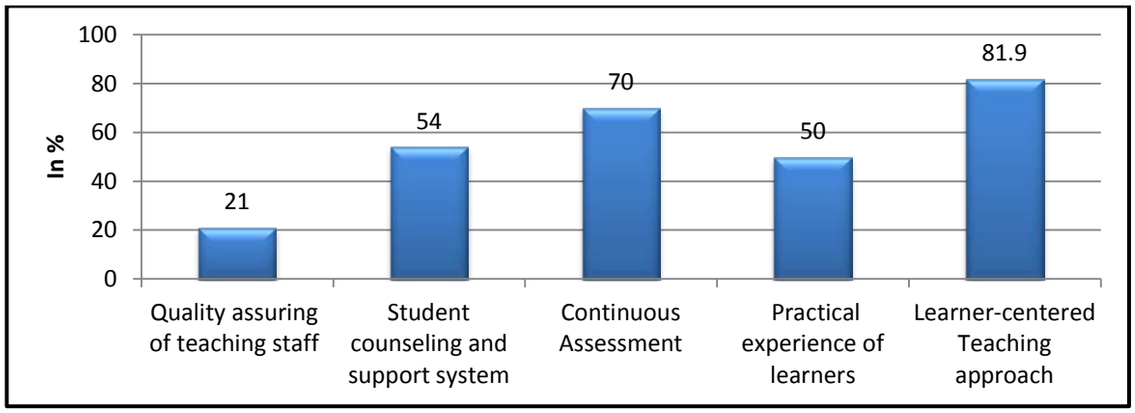


Figure 4.5 Mechanisms used by institutions to ensure the quality of teaching and learning

Most higher education institutions promote quality teaching as a central value. Universities illustrate the importance of their philosophy and a strong awareness of what students should gain through their learning experience. The internal quality assurance system is meant to insure the standards and continuous improvement of the quality evaluation of training programmes, quality evaluation of academic staff, and quality evaluation of learning.

Respondents from the case study institutions were asked to rank mechanisms used by institutions to ensure the quality of teaching and learning from most important to least

important**.** The majority of the respondents (81.9%) indicated learner-centred teaching approaches, (70%) continuous assessment and (54%) student counselling and support systems as "most important" and the major mechanisms used by all case study higher education institutions, other mechanisms, such as students' practical experience (50%) and quality assuring of teaching staff (20%) as "important". The graph indicates that the three mechanisms – the effort to implement learner-centred teaching approaches, the use of continuous assessment to identify student's progress, and providing timely advice and professional support, as well as student counselling and support systems were the core activities used by both public and private higher education institutions to ensure the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions. In addition to these mechanisms, students were engaged in practical activities in the form of internships and externships. Quality assuring of teaching staff was also carried out through higher diploma programmes, as well as short and long-term training.

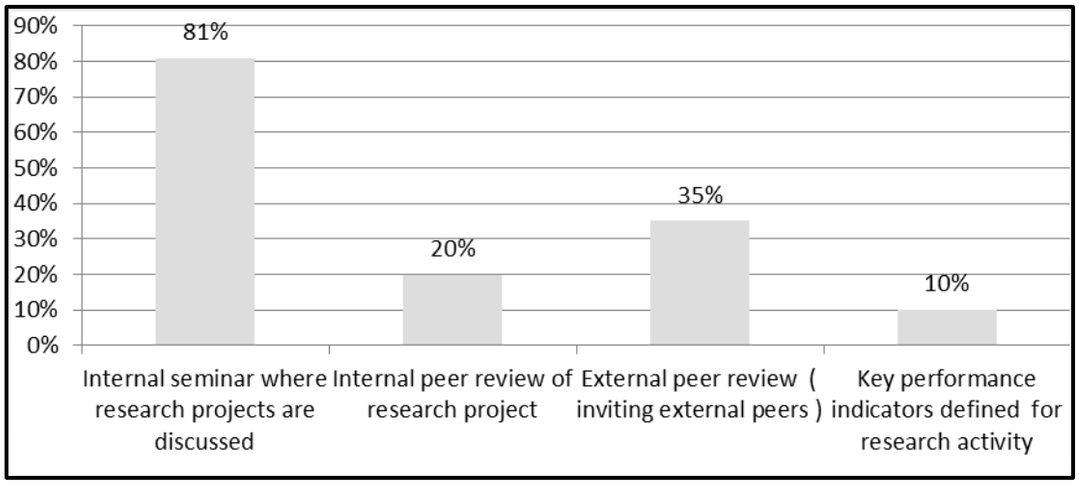


Figure 4.6 Process of ensuring the quality of research in the institutions

Respondents from public and private HEIs were asked to indicate the time they spend on research activities and processes put in place by their institution to ensure the quality of research. Since both private and public higher education institutions use similar processes to ensure the quality of research, I was forced to present the data all together rather than comparing the data from both kinds of higher education institutions. The institutional QA process covers research activities. All respondents, when asked whether or not they had specific processes in place with regard to QA in research, acknowledged that they did indeed

have individual processes in place, as shown in figure 4.6. The most common processes in both public and private higher education institutions were internal seminars where research projects and ideas were discussed (81%), external peer review or inviting external peers (35%) and internal peer review of research projects (20%). Regarding the time instructors spent on research activities per week, the majority of the respondents replied as “not specified”; very few of them indicated one to four (1-4) hours per week.

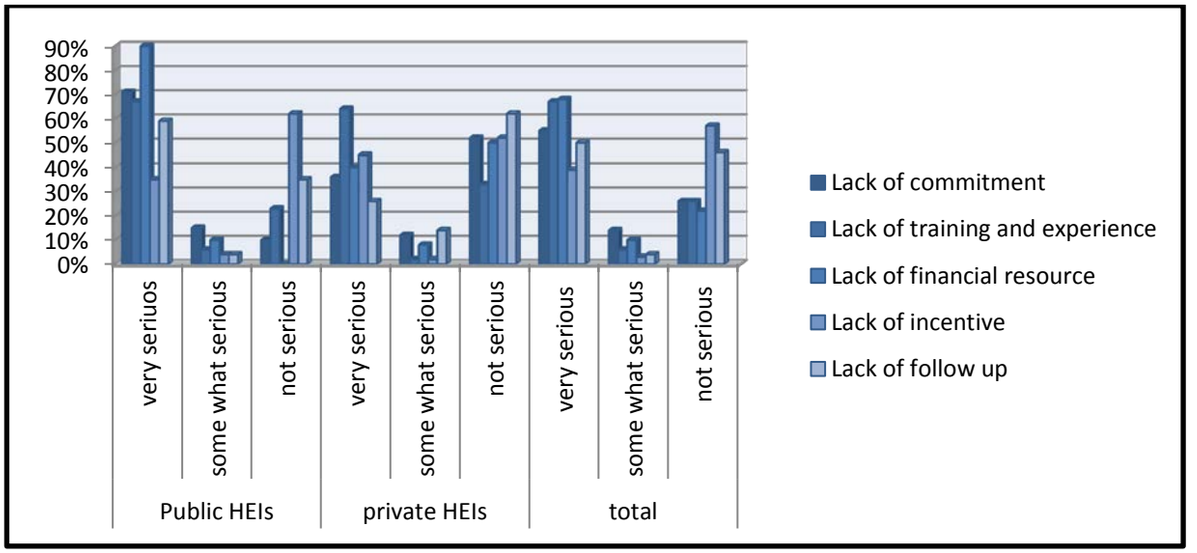


Figure 4.7 Factors influencing the effective implementation of QA systems

Quality assurance systems in Ethiopian higher education institutions are still at an infant stage and confronted by many challenges. Data collected during this study indicates that implementation of some of these processes was weak, particularly in public higher education institutions, due to numerous factors. Figure 4.7 shows variables assumed to have a negative impact on the implementation of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. In this regard, faculty QA coordinators, department heads and senior instructors were asked to rate their opinion about the problems listed according to their severity. Consequently, a total of 68% of respondents indicated that the lack financial resources for internal quality review were the most serious problem. The next serious problems, as reported by 67%, 62% and 55% of respondents, were the lack of appropriate training and experience in QA, commitment of institutional leaders and lack of follow-up on the part of the government or national QA agency respectively. In addition, the lack of incentives for internal reviewers (39%) was also

considered as a potential difficulty. The survey data indicates that in public HEIs a lack of finance for internal QA (90%), the absence of commitment of institutional leaders (71%) and the lack of training and experience (67%) were the most serious problems observed. in private HEIs, the lack of appropriate training and experience in QA (64%), the lack of incentives for quality reviewers (45%), and the lack of financial resources for internal QA were the major problems identified by respondents.

From the reaction of the three groups of respondents, it is apparent that the degree of seriousness of the problem varies from one institution to another, and particularly between public and private higher education institutions. Financial problems for internal quality review and commitment of institutional leaders were the first two major problems in public higher education institutions and lack of appropriate training and experience in QA and lack of incentives for quality reviewers were the two major problems observed in private higher education institutions. From the data we can infer that there were four most influential factors that affected the effective implementation of internal QA systems in Ethiopian higher education institutions. These included a lack of financial resources for internal quality review, lack of appropriate training and experience in QA, commitment of institutional leaders, and a lack of follow-up on the part of the government or the national QA agency.

4.3. INTERVIEW AND DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS FOR EACH CASE STUDY

This part presents the case studies of St Mary's University College, Admas University College, Jimma University and Hawassa University regarding all specific research questions. Here, I sketch the background of the case study institutions. The current practices of these university colleges and universities were analyzed in relation to the evolving national QA framework, using evidence collected through documentary review and interviews. The information taken from interviews and documents was analyzed together.

The status of the QA system and the way in which it has been implemented in different public and private higher education institutions was what I wanted to investigate through the case studies. This part explains the practices of the QA systems in all the case study institutions. Finally, I present an overall analysis of the results of the case studies in St Mary's University College, Admas University College, Jimma University and Hawassa University. In this part, data gathered from the interviews and documents from each case study institution is

analyzed and interpreted for each institution separately. All six specific research questions are addressed.

4.4. ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE (SMUC)

4.4.1. Background of the university college

St Mary's University College (SMUC) was founded in 1998. It is one of the private institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia. Its birth was prompted by the increasing demand for education in an increasingly competitive environment. The University College has degree programmes in Accounting, Secretarial Science and Office Management, Marketing Management, Management, Computer Science, Law, Languages, Social Sciences, Mathematics and Basic Sciences and Education. The University College offers regular, extension and distance modes of study (SED, 2009: 21). It is the first higher education institution to conduct an institutional quality audit, which was done in 2004. The Research and Quality Assurance Office, which was established at the beginning, was upgraded to the Centre for Research and Quality Assurance (CRQA) in March 2006 since quality assurance requires the involvement of all administrative and faculty members. St Mary's University College has established itself as one of the pioneers of QA for HEI in Ethiopia through the development of several initiatives. These demonstrate that both staff and management of St Mary's University College have a strong commitment to improving the quality of provision and raising the standards of teaching, learning and research in their own institution. These initiatives include being the first higher education institution in Ethiopia to undergo a quality audit, the sponsoring and running of a national conference on higher education held each year in Addis Ababa (2003-2011), being the forerunner in establishing an office (and providing resources) for QA, as well as producing a quarterly newsletter, *Quality Matters* (Ashcroft & Rayner, 2003: 21).

In September 2004, for the first time in the country St Mary's University College requested assistance in auditing the quality of its work from two VSO higher education management advisors working at the ministry of education, Professor Kate Ashcroft (then Vice Director of the Higher Education Strategy Centre) and Dr. Philip Rayners (then Vice Director of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency). In implementing this initiative, the management of St Mary's University College was taking a considerable risk but also being

remarkably prescient. The risk was that the result of the audit might show the weakness and problems with the provision that St Mary's University College offered and that this would become known to the university college's stakeholders and affect its recruitment (Ashcroft, 2005: 22). In general, this quality audit was the first of its kind within Ethiopia's higher education sector and placed St Mary's University College in the vanguard of quality assessment developments and policy. A quality audit c156ommittee was established in each faculty. In its attempt to react to the suggestion of HERQA, St Mary's University College established the Centre for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) and prepared its own Quality Assurance Manual, and guidelines and distributed it to pertinent offices. To this end, all faculties had formed their own quality assurance procedures.

The self-assessment document of the institution and the interview conducted with top managers indicate that the quality management system of the UC seems comprehensively focused on each core function: teaching and learning, curriculum and its relevance; students' assessment; research, and service processes. Furthermore, the implemented quality assurance system appears to be adequate because it contains the elements of a comprehensive framework on the one hand, and works genuinely in practice on the other, as the documents show (SED, 2009: 32).

4.4.2. Major themes from St Mary's University College

The data gathering for this case study focused on strengths and challenges of St Mary's University College with respect to implementing a QA system within the centrally regulated national QA system. Instead of presenting the case study by finding a simple categorical typology of strengths and challenges, I decided that a more meaningful and perceptive approach would be to present and discuss the findings under themes emerging from the interview and documentary data. The interview data (supported by the relevant official documents from St Mary's University College and external quality audit) showed many evolving themes. The themes were delimited to the scope of the specific research questions and the questions prepared for semi-structured interviews.

The themes were arrived at through content analysis of interview transcripts and documents through the process of iterative reading, identifying repeating concepts, clustering related concepts, and grouping and developing conceptual constructs. These themes are grouped

under two main groupings: external quality audit (EQA) and institutional quality audit (IQA). External quality audit refers to a national quality audit by the national quality assurance agency (HERQA) and institutional quality audit refers to an internal quality review by internal quality auditors of the institution. These themes are discussed below.

4.4.3. Themes related to external quality audit

4.4.3.1. Practices of the external quality assurance system

The first set of logical categories derived from the themes related to external QA is external quality audit. It is generally accepted that QA in higher education should entail both internal and external QA processes. Internal QA refers to processes undertaken within HEIs in order to assure quality. External QA, on the other hand, refers to processes that lie outside HEI. Within the scope of this thesis, the external dimensions include QA processes external to the HEIs and located at national level. This part has three analytic categories pertaining to the external dimension of QA in higher education. Within institutions of higher learning, the three most common forms of quality assurance processes are: the use of external examiners, self evaluation and academic audits.

In Ethiopia, the national quality assurance agency (HERQA) has a legal mandate to assess institutions and /or programmes, approve new programmes in private HEIs, and approve or (deny) the creation of new private HEIs. The agency sets minimum standards for institutions / programmes, monitors the performance of institutions, and has the power to approve or deny private institutions permission to operate. The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) has been engaged in assuring quality in higher education institutions since its establishment by proclamation number 351 of 2003. The agency has undertaken external institutional quality audits of private and public higher education institutions since 2004. From 2004 onwards external quality requirements have evolved and been adjusted to legal requirements within the country (SED 2011). Data from interviews and official documents reveal that HERQA has been conducting quality audits of St Mary's University College from 2004 onwards. According to one KI from top managers, the external quality audit has been done by HERQA experts. When institutions need an audit by external bodies or the National Quality Assurance Agency, they first conduct their own self-assessment and then request HERQA for an external quality audit. Before it is sent to HERQA, the self-assessment report

of the institution should be presented to the institutional quality audit task force. After that report has been debated, the final self-assessment report will be sent to HERQA. Based on the request of the institution and its self-assessment report, HERQA responds to their request or plans for an external quality audit. In addition to an external quality audit, HERQA conducts a quarterly visit to the university college to check whether the terms of the strategic plan have been achieved or not. HERQA expects the university to submit an internal Quality Audit report once a year.

4.4.3.2. Absence of a national quality policy or framework

According to Harman, policy is sometimes generally conceived as meaning everything that goes on in an organization. Such definition of policy as "what government chooses to do or not to do" makes the subject of policy too elusive for analytical purposes . In Harman's view, policy is "the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action being followed or to be followed in dealing with a recognized problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals. Policy also can be thought of as a position or stance developed in response to a problem or issue of conflict and directed towards a particular objective (Harman, 1984: 13). He further elaborates that externally driven quality assurance is underpinned by quality assurance policies that are "anchored in upward and managerial accountability values, particularly in terms of the reporting lines institutions have to observe, which are often mandatory and not optional". The external monitoring of quality will ultimately result in system improvement. The effectiveness of such external quality assurance efforts in enhancing sustainable quality delivery remains questionable, given that no attempt is made to assess either the teaching-learning process or the actual quality of the institution. While the audits may very well show that institutions have sound quality assurance systems and policies in place, there is no indication of how the systems and policies are operational zed in order to yield desired standards of excellence. To this extent, it can be argued that external quality audits remain mere blueprints.

My analysis of national quality assurance policies focused on documents as well as action on the ground. Thus in this study I view policy as written statements of general purpose meant to address identified core quality areas. This requires looking through documents and getting to understand national and institutional set goals and actions that are planned in order to

achieve those goals. To understand the national QA agency and institutional policy on quality assurance, I analyzed external and internal quality assurance documents, manuals and guidelines laid down by university colleges and the national quality assurance agency. I also interacted in a formal interview with the management of the universities, university colleges and experts of the national quality assurance agency on their practices and procedures in assuring quality. The national QA policy can serve as a framework for institutional QA policies and QA systems. However, one key informant (KI) from the national QA agency (HERQA) stated: In the section below, KI's opinions are given in their own –unedited –words printed in italic.

> *At the beginning the concept of QA system was introduced to Ethiopia from the north (British consultants who came to Ethiopia for consultancy services), from South Africa, Ireland and VSO. At national level there is no Quality assurance policy that serves as a framework for higher education institution. We have national Quality Assurance Standards (HERQA's ten focus areas). HEIs also used these HERQA's focus areas as a framework. Yet we have a plan to develop a national QA policy in conjunction with HEIs.*

The KI further elaborated that the idea of a quality assurance system emerged in the country because of the rapid growth of private higher education institutions accompanied by rapid growth in student enrolments in HEIs, resulting in demands for greater relevance in the university curriculum and calls for higher quality from employers and the universities. Consequently, the higher education community, government and other stakeholders urgently sought new mechanisms to improve quality and stop the decline in the quality of higher education. Now they are thinking how to develop a quality assurance policy in conjunction with higher education institutions. The QA director of the university college expressed the view that "*Even though, HERQA conducting external quality audit in our university college since 2004, there is no national QA policy and QA model set by national quality assurance agency that can serve as national framework (as a base) to develop our institution QA policy and QA model. Simply 'Fitness for Purpose' and quality as enhancement are used as a guiding principle*". In general, there was no national and institutional document that revealed the existence of a national quality assurance policy. The external and internal

quality audit reports of higher education institutions indicate that all public and private higher education institutions use the HERQA ten focus areas as a framework (standard) to audit their own performance without having a QA policy and model.

4.4.3.3. Accreditation and its impact

Accreditation refers to an evaluation by an authorized body (national quality assurance agency) of whether an institution or an educational programme qualifies for a certain status. This status may have its implication for the institution itself (e.g. permission to operate) and / or its students and graduates (qualification for certain employment) (Brennan and Shah, 2000a: 32). The accreditation decision is frequently based on the results of an evaluation process. As indicated in national and institutional documents, pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation of private higher education institutions and some other non-governmental institutions are the primary activities of HERA. To facilitate the work of external assessors and help the private higher education institution to recognize the standards and minimum requirements by which they will be assessed, guidelines, checklists and procedures for pre-accreditation and accreditation have been developed with the participation of the stakeholders and on the basis of the higher education proclamation. The actual accreditation process works only for private HEIs, not for public universities. As indicated in the HERQA document, in addition to meeting the course approval and provider's accreditation requirements for individual courses, private tertiary education providers are required to demonstrate ongoing compliance with overarching quality standards, relating to all aspects of the development, delivery and assessment of education and training. I asked the St Mary's University College executive vice president why accreditation of institutions / programmes was limited to private HEIs. *What is the impact of this accreditation process in promoting the performance of your university college?* The KI stated that:

> *HERQA has been conducting quarterly visit in private HEIs and accredit our programs. HERQA always consider all private HEIs as fraudulent, the agency have suspicion of the performance of private HEIs. So, all private HEIs programs should pass through the national accreditation process. Public HEIs are accredited by the government by reason of being government sponsored, the policy makers also doubtful of the quality of graduates from Private HEIs.*

This is wrong perception, all private HEIs are not fraudulent, and it is the weakness of the national QA agency to identify them and take measures. Even though, public universities enrolling the high scorers and private HEIs take low scorers in 12th grade national examination, yet we are producing better graduates than public HEIs.

According to the KI, public HEIs should not be exempt from the accreditation process. All tertiary institutions, both public and private, should be subjected to accreditation. The government needs to develop a comprehensive and standardized accreditation system that covers all public and private HEIs because the quality of education in public higher education institutions has been deteriorating over time as a result of the absence of accreditation.

Concerning the impact of accreditation, the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) in conjunction with MOE have the power to close down private HEIs that fail to fulfil the accreditation criteria and to publicize the outcomes of accreditation. The agency publishes a list of accredited and non-accredited institutions based on their performance. The publication of the names of accredited institutions and denial of accreditation has both powerful positive and negative effects on the future of private HEIs. Those institutions that are accredited gain an important kind of recognition nationally and internationally for having achieved standards of quality and demonstrating a commitment to continue quality improvement. Accredited private HEIs also make themselves better able to respond to business needs and public demands because having a license to continue will boost the morale of that academic institution. Accreditation also needs self-assessment and timely follow-up by HERQA, the process of preparing for self-assessments and timely follow-up also encourages institutions to improve their quality to meet the expected national standards. Therefore, the accreditation process has positive impact on the performance St Mary's University College.

4.4.4. Themes related to institutional QA systems

4.4.4.1. Trends in internal quality assurance systems

Quality assurance activities involving the development of clear quality assurance structures (in the form of quality assurance offices or units and personnel) and the regular evaluation of institutional performance are common features of higher education systems in most parts of

the world. These developments are taking place at institutional as well as at national level. Key features of such new developments at national level involve the establishment of national quality assurance agencies that monitor and promote quality in tertiary institutions through national regulating policy and regular site visits of institutions (Mahlgan, 2009: 45).

In an effort to provide quality education, SMUC has undertaken numerous quality assurance activities to assess and assure quality education at the university college. It is the first higher education institution to conduct an institutional quality audit in the country, which was done in 2004. SMUC has established itself as one of the pioneers of QA systems for HEIs in Ethiopia (SMUC: 2009: 23). According to the interview with the executive vice president of the UC, the university college has achieved this through the development of several initiatives. In September 2004, SMUC for the first time in the country requested assistance in auditing the quality of its work from two VSO higher education management advisors working at the Ministry of Education, Professor Kate Ashcroft and Dr Philip Rayners. This quality audit was the first of its kind within the Ethiopian higher education sector and enabled SMUC to be in the vanguard of quality assessment developments. This demonstrates that both staff and management of SMUC have a strong commitment to improving the quality of provision and raising the standards of teaching, learning and research. Quality assurance and research enhancement efforts at SMUC began in 2003 upon the establishment of the unit for research and institutional evaluation, which was accountable to the academic dean's office.

In the view of the KI from the QA office, two important events within the university college could be regarded as landmarks in the establishment and growth of CRQA. The first one is the institutional quality audit that was initiated by the institution itself and undertaken in 2004 with the assistance of two British higher education experts (Prof. Kate Ashcroft and Dr Philip Rayner) from Volunteer Service Overseas from Addis Ababa. The second one was that, with the objectives of promoting the culture of continuous improvement and promoting research within the university college, CRQA was further upgraded to a Centre for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA), incorporating an independent unit composed of a permanent director and officer. As indicated in QA guidelines established in 2011, the Centre for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) is currently organized in three units, Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), Academic Development Resource

Centre (ADRC), and Data Processing and Information Unit (DPI). It accomplishes its major responsibilities by providing institutional quality assurance mechanisms, academic staff development, a consultancy service, data processing, documenting and disseminating information. The establishment of the Centre for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) has been a development in this process. The university college has appointed a senior academic member of staff to be responsible for CEIQA, and St Mary's University College was one of the first HEIs in Ethiopia to recognize that effective quality assurance would not only need considerable commitment and resources to be allocated by senior management, but also commitment and understanding of the aim of such an office from all staff at the university.

CEIQA plays a key role in undertaking staff and department /faculty evaluations as well as overseeing research and material production for the university college. In line with the ambition of St Mary's University College to be a leader in quality assurance in Ethiopia, the work undertaken in relation to quality assurance and implementation is disseminated through the highly professional newsletter *Quality Matters*, distributed quarterly to relevant stakeholders in the higher education sector .

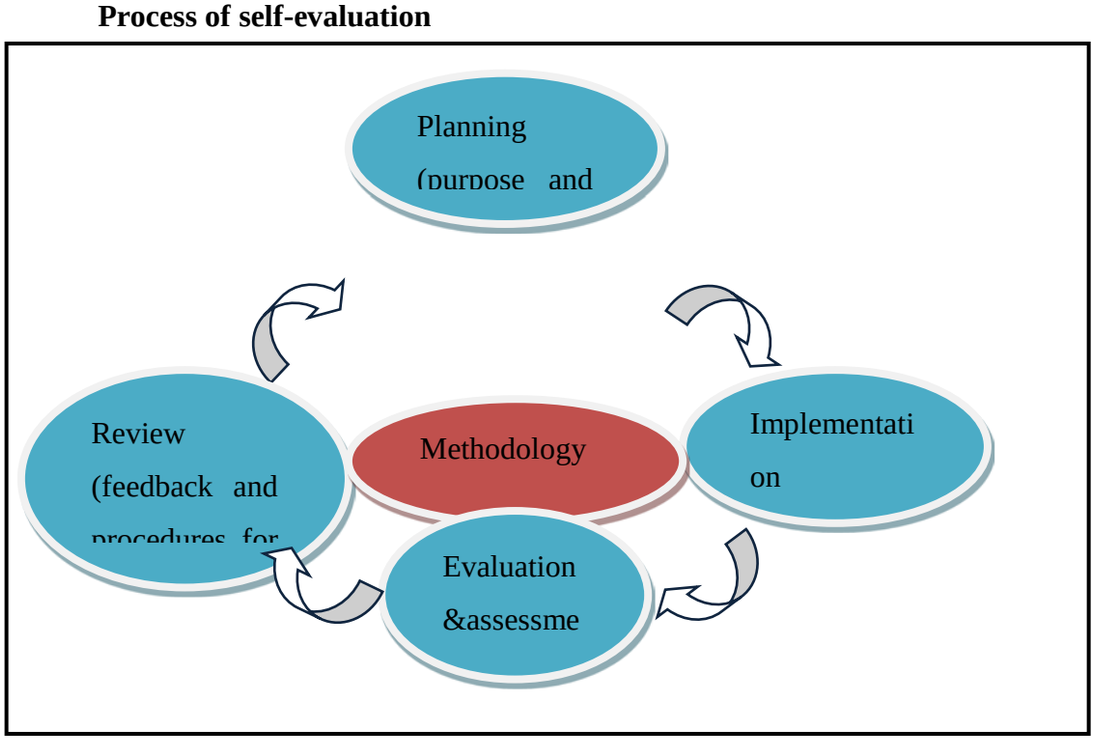


Figure 4.8 SMUC QA operational framework (CEIRQA 2009, 42)

SMUC aims to foster a quality culture whereby every member of staff contributes to and assumes responsibility for the quality aspects of their work. In addition to individual responsibilities and accountabilities, SMUC has a comprehensive committee structure in place to take ultimate responsibility for the operation of quality assessment at the university college level and ensure that its mission is achieved. The Quality Assurance Standing Committee (QASC) is a standing committee of the senate. It was established to link the efforts of CEIQA with the senate, and oversee matters related to quality assurance across the various units / offices and departments of the institution. QASC was the highest governing body entrusted with the tasks of directing the overall quality framework and operation of all programmes and courses at SMUC. It is composed of the president, the director of CEIQA, the academic vice president, the administrative vice president, the vice president for research, graduate studies and the heads of all QAUs. QASC meets at least four times a year and reports to the senate (CEIQA, 2011).

As stated in the QA manual and as it emerged from the interview with the QA office director, the Quality Assurance Standing Committee, which is accountable to the senate, has the responsibility to

> *Formulate a strategic vision with strong focus on strategic directions and plans for SMUC's overall quality assurance efforts;*
> *Watch over the quality of programmes in order to ensure the attainment of their aims and objectives;*
> *Monitor the smooth running of the processes of quality assessment to ensure effective coordination, administration, delivery and operation;*
> *Approve new guidelines for quality assessment in accordance with its stipulated objectives and the university college quality assurance policies and processes; and implement the same after approval by the council;*
> *Endorse and confirm the quality of assessment in the programmes / courses;*
> *Make decisions on the participants' assessment and recommendations and ensure the maintenance of academic standards;*

Review the operation of the programme each year based on the result of the annual quality assessment report and prepare reports as may be required by the university college senate (St.Mary UC: 2011) .

The interview with the UC quality assurance director and dean of the Business College and the UC document confirmed that the faculty established its own quality enhancement committee. The committee comprised the faculty dean as chair, assistant faculty deans, department heads, and staff representatives. At faculty levels, the quality enhancement committee had 12 members; one student represented each department. The 12 members were classified, in turn, into three task forces. The tasks expected to be covered were categorized into three major sections and given to the task forces. The task forces were chaired by the head of the three degree offering departments. The Faculty Quality Assessment Unit (FQAU) supervised quality operations at faculty and department levels. The faculty or college dean or their nominee chaired the FQAU, and membership consisted of the relevant subject /programme team leaders or department heads. The FQAU met regularly to approve assessment results and to review the operation of the programme. The frequency of the meetings was determined by the committee. The administrative QA unit (AQAU) was obliged to audit the service and support systems of the university college in order to assure its function of support to the university college mission. The Department Quality Assessment Team (DQAT) was chaired by the head of the department, who administered the assessment activity at the department level in collaboration with the staff of the CEIQA. The team was composed of members of the department and finally the quality assurance unit for offices under the academic vice president. The offices were responsible to assess the services offered by such offices as the registrar, library, programme office and student affairs office, practicum and apprenticeship office or any other office.

As reported by faculty deans and the university QA director, before the committee began its operation, meetings were held with the SMUC's president. In the meeting, quality enhancement committees of different units agreed to conduct quality assessments. To have common understanding between quality enhancement committees of different units of SMUC, the quality assurance manual was distributed to each committee member. Based on

this decision; the faculty organized and embarked on self-assessment of the programme level and produced a report. Finally, they submitted the final draft of the self-assessment report to the CEIQA (SMUC, 2009). According to the view of KI from faculty deans

> *Internal quality audit starts from department quality assessment based on our department objectives and plan. We conduct our self - assessment and report to the faculty and institutional quality audit Office at the same time. Not only the academic departments, each office of the university college expected to conduct their own self-review and report to the institutional QA office. The institutional QA office was rigorous, based on the reports of each academic and administrative QA unit the institutional quality auditors check the activities of these units sometime by inviting Peer reviewers / peer assessors from outside.*

Following the institutional quality audit visit, the self-assessment report was presented to the institutional quality audit task force. After thorough discussion, the final self-assessment report was sent to the national QA agency (HERQA).

4.4.4.2. Development, approval and revision of courses

One of the most crucial elements determining the quality of student learning is the quality of academic programmes that students go through. The UC places due emphasis on quality assuring course development and approval activities, hence mechanisms and processes are implemented to ensure that quality programmes that give students national and international competitiveness are offered.

The view of the vice president, faculty deans, and the QA director regarding course development and approval is summarized below.

The process of course approval involves academic committee structures that operate at different levels within the UC. At the UC there were clear procedures and guidelines that were followed in the approval of newly developed courses. Newly developed courses had to go through various committee structures before they could be approved. Course proposals start at the department or academic unit level, proceed through the faculty council and go to the senate for approval. Open hearings organized by the senate academic standard and curriculum committee may be required to precede faculty council action on provisional and

permanent approval of programmes or courses. The senate may call for additional documentation for hearings. Following approval, ongoing course performance is monitored and evaluated against both internal performance indicators and external measures of student satisfaction and professional requirements through SMUC's course quality assurance process.

In curriculum development and approval, departments have a responsibility to develop the curriculum and associated approval documentation, notifying relevant stakeholders of proposed curriculum development, ensuring appropriate consultation with stakeholders. The faculty council was responsible for changes to an existing course, new and revised units and unit outlines. The faculty council was responsible for reporting to the senate academic standards and curriculum committee on approved curriculum development. The Academic Standard and Curriculum Committee (ASCC) is responsible for approving a new course or programme or changes to an existing course. The usual practice for St Mary's University College is to revise the curriculum within the three-year interval so that there is significant improvement on each department curriculum in respect of learning outcomes and the extent to which the curriculums meet the demand and needs of the stakeholders. This is a key quality assurance structure that guards against offering poorly designed and poorly conceived academic programmes. The relevant committees and processes highlighted above are captured by the following interview response by a member of the top management of the UC.

> *Proposal for a new courses go through quite rigorous processes. Department/ academic unit come up with the new course. They are discussed at department and faculty levels before they go to faculty curriculum committee. After the courses are approved by the academic council, they go to academic standard and curriculum committee and finally approved by the senate. So there is clearly defined process. However, the way and the time the existing courses revised were not clear and there is not regular time for course revision.*

In addition to the above-mentioned processes, external stakeholders such as experts from other universities and organizations participated and played an important role in quality assuring course/ programme development. Thus quality assuring academic programmes at

SMUC has both an internal dimension, which involves committees assessing programmes / courses before they are implemented, and an external dimension, where the HERQA comes in to accredit the same programmes and where other external stakeholders also participate.

4.4.4.3. Tracer study

To assess our quality, we have to look not only at the quality of our process, but also consider the output. First, we must look at our graduates. Did they achieve the expected standards? Are the achieved outcomes equal to the expected outcomes? Have the graduates acquired the expected knowledge, skills and attitudes? The final test of our quality is the graduates. Did he or she really achieve the expected learning outcomes? This is not easy to measure and can only be known through feedback from the labour market and from alumni (Matter, 2011:2).

KIs from faculty deans and the institutional document mentioned that a student satisfaction survey had been conducted by the Centre for Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA) in 1999 EC. Areas in which students were dissatisfied were also indicated. According to the view of the KIs and the quality assurance manual document, the other institutional quality assurance mechanism is feedback from employers. Many private and public organizations have been showing an interest to employ their graduates. They reported that they received many employment requests every year. They have prepared a list of regular employers and their addresses. In addition, faculty staff members have had face-to-face discussions with employers while visiting their own students during their internship. As the KIs indicated, the information obtained from employers indicates that the students of the university college were capable of performing the assigned tasks, eager to learn from others, committed, and cooperative with company employees. The information received from the employers was also used to make readjustments on course offerings. Therefore, the above evidence taken from interview respondents and institutional documents that a tracer study was used as one of the quality assuring mechanisms for St Mary's University College.

4.4.4.4. Internal quality assurance of teaching and learning

Apart from assuring course / programme development, the rigour of the teaching and learning practices of an institution determines quality of delivery. This is considered as the

cutting edge of an educational institution because that is what affects students' learning. The case study of the UC placed considerable emphasis on this aspect of university activities, with some stating it quite explicitly in their mission statements. Part of the vision of the SMUC, for instance, states: "The vision of the UC to became among the leading higher education centre for academic excellence in teaching-learning and research". To achieve this vision, various activities have been taking place at the various levels to ensure acceptable quality teaching in academic units, departments and faculties of the university college. One KI from the Law Faculty expressed the following view: "the responsibility for the academic leadership and teaching and learning at the University College rests with the Academic V/P and academics staff. The responsibility for decision-making rests ultimately with the senate. Faculty deans and department heads play key roles in decentralized structures. That faculties and departments are the key structures responsible for teaching and learning is evident in the review mechanisms of the faculties".

As the academic vice president of the UC indicated, there were different ways through which they could check the quality of teaching in their institution. These were regular meetings with students' class representatives in which students reflected their concerns. Their ideas and comments were used as input to improve the quality of teaching. Issues related to course coverage, students' assessment, test/examination feedback to students, and teaching resources (facilities) were discussed. The theoretical learning in the classroom was also supported by practical activities (panel discussions, public lectures and educational visits). Student support in the form of advising, arranging tutorials on some difficult major courses and peer teaching were some of the activities in the university to enhance the quality of teaching. The interview with another KI (faculty dean) regarding strategies for quality learning indicated the following:

> *Quality learning fosters students higher order intellectual capacities that enable them to discover knowledge for them and to apply knowledge for problem solving. Accordingly, each department under the faculty has been practicing various teaching and learning strategies in order to enhance quality of learning. Some of these were: panel discussions were organized on various topics, exhibitions and visits were organized on various issues, in order to make*

students problem solvers and to make them familiar with the actual work environment, two basic courses are incorporated in each department curriculum, these are senior research and internship, the faculty strongly works on these courses, each student required to take research method and undertake research on selected topics individually for two semesters under the close supervision of the assigned supervisor, the department also organizes two defence sessions.

According to the views of the vice president of the UC and faculty deans, the internship programme makes the university college one of the few educational institutions in our country and the first of private higher education institutions to have such a programme. After students have completed their second-year studies, they will be sent to various offices to work on any job related to their field of specialization. The programme is conducted for 320 hours for regular students. Teaching and learning indicators used by the faculties include: satisfaction of graduates with their course, students' feedback in teaching, retention and success rates of students, students' feedback on the appropriateness and fairness of assessment feedback and availability of student services and IT facilities.

As indicated in SED (2011) and other institutional documents, academic appraisal was one of the mechanism by which the SMUC ensure their quality education. SMUC operates a well-documented system for evaluation for merit pay. This includes three aspects: (1) teaching performance (65%), student evaluation (50%), head of department evaluation (15%), teaching material production (10%), practical activities for students organized by the teacher and timely submission of grade and attendance records; (2) research and training (25%), involvement in research (75%) and training (25%); and (3) service (10%) involvement in committee work (departmental, institutional) and community service (67%) and other efforts (33%).

Assessment also provides valuable information for the institution about the efficiency of teaching and learning. To a certain extent, assessment reflects the quality and performance of teaching and learning. At SMUC, the Departmental Quality Assurance Team (DQAT) has overall responsibility for all aspects of programmes and course assessment, including setting

and marking. SMUC has clear and published criteria for marking. It has a testing centre at institutional level that coordinates efforts at division, faculty and department levels and works towards improving the overall assessment and examination system.

The assessment policy and guidelines of the university suggest that student assessment practices at SMUC sometimes rely on external examiners as well as on a wide range of internal practices that vary from faculty to faculty and discipline to discipline. When the QASC finds it necessary, SMUC could appoint external examiners to assist in maintaining assessment standards of its award-bearing programmes at a level comparable to similar programmes. "*External examiners could be appointed for all programs where it is felt necessary*". Nominations are made by the dean of the faculty or department head based on the instruction of the QASC. The external examiners are academic/ professional experts of high standing in relevant disciplines. They are responsible to comment and advise on the standards of the programme (including all student assessment matters such as assessment methods, assessment criteria, grading systems and student performance standards). Specifically, they comment on draft examination papers and marking schemes. They also assess the overall quality of students' performance.

While the continuous assessments are viewed as part of the teaching process and largely the responsibility of the instructor, the testing centre has a significant role to play. This includes assisting departments in designing end-of-semester standard criterion referenced examinations. Building upon past practices, the testing centre collaborates with academic departments toward further improvement by way of filling gaps in the process. The assistance on the part of the centre includes continuous training support on tests preparation and associated issues. The assessment policy of the university college on the implementation of continuous assessment determines that continuous assessment constitutes 50% and the final examination 50% of the result. So quality assurance is a continuous process and when any problem in any particular course or regulation that works against students is identified, it is examined and measures for improvement are recommended to the higher committee.

4.4.4.5. Research and publication

The vision of SMUC is, “to become a centre of academic excellence in research, content publishing and dissemination in higher education”. The UC has established a research and publication office headed by a director. According to the view of the research and publication director, this office is responsible for the following specific activities: organizing the research conference on PHE (private higher education), the annual multi-disciplinary conference, the annual student research forum, and so on. At the beginning, the office was merged with the quality assurance office, but it later separated from the QAO and became an independent office. The UC has established a research policy and guidelines for research activities that encourage research and publishing by staff. It also places greater emphasis on research on a par with the teaching-learning activities of the university college. The following is a sample of views given by the research and publication director on the engagement of academics and students on research activities:

> *There have been three types of research activities in the UC, which includes multi-Disciplinary research forum which gives a chance for the university community (PhD,*
> *and MA/MSC thesis) to presents their own work, Research for international and national conferences in which international and national researchers can participate and contribute and the third one is student research forum which includes students’ research proposal defence which accounts 40% of the research course and final research course defence which accounts 60% of the research course.*

To enhance the research skill of the students, all faculty students have been taking the research course with six credit hours. It comprises a proposal and main research defence that could be held at the institutional level. The students take a research refreshment course by experienced instructors at the beginning of the course for six weeks. During the main research defence, internal and external examiners are assigned for each undergraduate student. After all graduate students have completed their research defence; the best three research papers are selected and presented at the UC level. One KI from faculty deans raised the following issue regarding instructor’s engagement on research: “*We are doing*

research at UC level in a team and individually but most of us are not happy with the research output of the faculty. Our participation at national conference and multi- disciplinary research (which focuses on institutional problems) was not satisfactory. A lot of us involved in teaching practices inside and outside the UC that takes a lot of our time, right up to August. During the semester there is work overload".

As indicated in the research and publication office annual report, SMUC has been engaged in promoting research as it is considered one of the University College's primary objectives. Since the beginning, the main orientation of research at St Mary's has been towards HEIs and educational quality issues. To support and promote research in these areas of interest, the University College has so far sponsored and organized nine annual national conferences. For example, more than eighty research papers, presented during the conferences (held 2003 to 2006) have been published in the form of conference proceedings. Out of these, 36 were contributed by SMUC staff. These annual national research conferences have created opportunities for SMUC staff and the wider academic community to engage in research. These have covered a wide range of educational issues relating to the quality of education in Ethiopia. The UC has published and distributed the proceedings of each conference.

SMUC also has a research award scheme for funding graduate and undergraduate students' theses in the area of private higher education. The University College further places emphasis on improving SMUC students' research skills. To this end, it conducted the First Student Research Forum on September 2, 2007. The UC has put in place a number of mechanisms in order to enhance research, but the major problems seem to be time available for research and lack of incentives for academic staff engaged on research. The absence of satisfactory incentives has led to unsatisfactory commitment to research by academic staff.

4.4.4.6. Commitment of SMUC managers to quality assurance

Commitment in this study can be seen in terms of establishing QA systems, assigning resources (financial) for QA, assigning of experts, quality reviewers, and developing quality manuals, guidelines, providing training for quality reviewers and academic and non-academic units for effective implementation of the institutional QA system. As indicated in the institutional document and interview with the QA director, the UC has set up an institutional QA office headed by one fulltime senior quality assurance director. The QA office comes

under the overall direction and guidance of the director for quality assurance. Three fulltime experts are also employed to monitor and support the QA process of the university college. The Centre for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) coordinates the total quality management system of the institution and oversees the implementation of the college-wide quality assurance activities based on QA manuals and guidelines set by the university college. The UC has developed a QA manual and guidelines based on the national framework (HERQA's ten focus areas) which serves as a framework for institutional quality management.

The faculty has also established its own quality enhancement committee or faculty quality assessment unit (FQAU). The Faculty Quality Assessment Unit oversees quality operations at faculty and department levels. The FQAU regularly meets to approve quality assessment results and to review the operation of the programme. The quality assurance process was not limited to academic units; the administrative QA unit (AQAU) was also established to audit the service and support systems of the UC in order to assure that its functions support the UC mission. The institution saw quality as primarily a professional issue, whereby the staff members committed to undertake their roles efficiently and effectively and demonstrate a willingness to improve existing practice and to be innovative. The institution also involved external academics and professionals, industry and community groups in its QA processes.

At all levels of faculty, departments, and support services, quality facilitators were identified to contribute to improving existing academic and administrative quality systems. Other members of the university college senior management, such as the librarian, registrar and finance officer took delegated responsibility for quality in their respective areas. The Academic Vice president of the SMUC viewed the idea as follows:

> *If you have good leaders, then quality takes care of itself. If you don't have good leaders, no amount of report writing and form-filing is going to bring about quality. Efforts to raise the quality assurance processes as I have experienced in the past, tend to put more and more pressure on the people at the bottom of the academic hierarchy, the ones who do most of the teaching and are supposed to be most active in research. The pressure, in my view, should be*

on the people at the top to ensure quality. They provide the academic leadership, institutional stability and efficiency.

He further explained that quality activities received the appropriate support and were provided with human and financial resources for doing quality work. For example, the existence of a written institutional quality manual was a clear expression of the leaders' and academics' commitment concerning quality assurance implementation. The quality policy was translated into a set of guiding principles and deployed into quality goals, defining what the college should do and in what order. The QAO was provided with the appropriate financial, infrastructural and human resources by its owners and leaders to implement quality management. As one KI from the UC quality assurance office stated, "*If the needs could be justified, we get the necessary financial resources and human resources for quality; we have no problem regarding this*".

Another indicator of the commitment of institutional leaders was that external consultants were invite to support the whole implementation process. At the beginning, they offered training for staff members, and then helped in developing quality assurance processes, procedures and the quality manual, and in implementing the quality management system. As one KI stated, "*the external consultants positively influenced the quality management implementation process, and contributed to getting rid of the fears of institutional members concerning quality management. However, at the beginning when we start QA system implementation, we had external consultants from VSO. But now we are working alone or by our professionals, no need of employing external quality experts*." Therefore, the above information confirms that the top management of the university college was committed to safeguarding their quality of education. The commitment of the UC was high.

4.4.4.7. Impact of internal and external QA systems

A fundamental question in relation to the development of QA systems in higher education is whether or not the external and internal QA systems have any impact on the quality of higher education itself,in particular the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum design and review and research activities of the institution. Some studies indicate that extensive experience in evaluation has caused academic institutions to give greater attention to the

issues of effective teaching and learning. In some systems, degree completion rates have also improved as student services and advising have received more attention.

Most participants of the study (interviewed individuals) from SMUC unequivocally stated that there was a definite improvement of teaching and learning as a result of external and internal QA processes. A selected view of one KI is stated below.

> *The establishment of QA system nationally and institutionally has a far-reaching positive impact. The concepts of quality and quality assurance system were embedded in the minds of staff members, UC managers and policy makers. Since the UC was the pioneer of QA system in the country, many public and private HEIs in the country have shared or learned a lot of things from this UC regarding QA system. As a result of QA system the number of publications increased (number of journals and articles).*

Another KI reflected on the impact of the current QA process:

> *It is difficult to discern the impact of QA system; we can't ignore all of the other System that led towards the outcome or the benefit of good teaching practice. In reality after the establishment of QA process in our UC, the institutional management improved, strategic plan has been strengthened, increased awareness of the academic staff on quality. The external QA also impact up on university performance through its influence on the UC internal processes through accreditation.*

Formalized quality management procedures imposed from above or outside have little effect on the quality of learning and teaching. However, an external QA process acts as a powerful initial catalyst, and serves a role of validation for university-led reform. Therefore, most of the interviewed respondents agreed that the pressure from the national QA agency through quality audits and accreditation and internal self-assessment has a positive impact on the performance of the UC.

Concerning the commitment of the institutional leaders, quality assurance implementation got the basic subsidy and got support from the top management of the university college. As the

QA leaders stated, the university college senate assured the basic conditions and resources for quality work. They also emphasised that the academic vice president, the QA director and experts, and academic staff participated in QA training and showed their commitment to the quality assurance issue. St Mary's University College hired professionals to help with the implementation process. Their commitment on quality management implementation was practical and genuine, not symbolic like that of the other two case study institutions (JU and HU). The university college had a robust quality assurance system and hired QA professionals to maintain the quality of their education.

4.5. ADMAS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE (AUC)

4.5.1. Background of the university college

Admas University College started its operation in October 1998 as Admas Business Training Center under the license issued to Adama College PLC. In April 1999, it was upgraded to become Admas College. In 2000, it was given full accreditation by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Following further expansion and improvements, the institution was again upgraded in 2006 and designated as Admas University College (SED, 2011).

The university college has three rented campuses in Addis Ababa (Olympia campus for degree programmes and Meskel and Misirak campuses for TVET regular programmes). The university college offers four undergraduate regular degree programmes in Accounting, Management, Marketing Management, and Information and Communication Technology in two faculties.

As stated by the quality assurance director of the university college, the AUC started the endeavour of assuring the quality of education at their inception. They have made more progress since 1996 EC. Currently, the AUC has a fully-fledged quality assurance office. They have also developed an institutional quality assurance policy, different quality assurance guidelines and manuals and included the activities of quality assurance in their strategic plan to maintain their quality education. The quality assurance office is led by an assistant professor who is accountable directly to the president, which might make them different from other higher education institutions in Ethiopia, because many of the quality assurance offices are directly accountable to academic vice presidents. The QA director

stated that they made the QAO accountable to the university president because the administration and other wings also had to give careful consideration to quality and this office was made to be independent of other wings so as to play a strong role regarding the extent of monitoring and maintaining quality even on what was being done by the president and, if possible, beyond the level of the president's office.

4.5.2. Major quality assurance themes from Admas College

In this case study, I decided that a more meaningful and perceptive approach would be to present and focus the findings from Admas University College under themes in a similar pattern to the St Mary's University College case study. Hence, the interview data (supported by relevant official documents) revealed the following emergent themes, grouped under two main groupings: external quality audit (EQA) and institutional quality audit (I QA). The "external" quality audit refers to the national quality audit by the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) and the "institutional" quality audit refers to the internal quality review by internal quality auditors of the university college. These themes, identified for discussion in this case study, were necessarily limited to the scope of the specific research questions of the study and the questions prepared for semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

4.5.3. Themes related to external quality audit

4.5.3.1. Practices of internal quality assurance systems

Even though most countries give more priority to internal self-evaluation and to using external governmental audits for the purpose of standardization and ensuring that all institutions conform to national policies, Van .D (2000) and De wert (1990: 67) remark that external quality assessment mechanisms are unavoidable as governments have to account to parliament for money spent on education. This internal evaluation is complemented by external evaluation carried out by bodies or groups from without the institution: government agencies, non-government agencies and peers.

HERQA's quality audit reports indicate that the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) has been involved in assuring quality in higher education institutions in Ethiopia as an external quality audit body since its establishment in 2003. HERQA is

currently engaged with major stakeholders in developing a robust quality assurance system at national and institutional levels. There are no independent non-governmental QA agencies engaged on quality audit at national level. HERQA is the only government Quality Assurance agency with a mandate to conduct quality audits of private and public higher education institutions. As one of the key activities of HERQA it carries out institutional quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs). HERQA intends that through its institutional quality audit reports and dissemination of good practice it will help to enhance the provision of higher education in Ethiopia and the confidence of all stakeholders in the quality and relevance of that provision.

According to the QA Director, the UC is one of the private higher education institutions externally audited by HERQA. As he mentioned, HERQA has audited about nine government and five private higher educational institutions in its first round of quality audits. He further explained about external quality audits as follows:

> *What we did was that we first prepared our internal quality audit. We voluntarily asked them to audit our performance, then, they sent a certain team of specialized professionals to exhaustively audit our hitherto performances. The team of experts took quite a long time to audit every activity of the university college and gave their feedback reports. The published report was disseminated to the public. What is more important from this report is that we have learned a lot of things.*

As a result, they executed the following activities. First, they prepared an enhancement plan which is developed to fill perhaps the possible gaps observed in the external audit report and enhances what has been considered as areas of strength of the university college to maintain them even better. This enhancement plan is essential because, not only does it fill the gap observed and enable them to continue their strengths, but it also enables them to see where they belong. He stated: "*We compare ourselves with the other private high education institutions, in general, and the requirements of the expected standard of quality of education nationally and internationally*". HERQA institutional quality audit proceeds through a number of stages: the initial action is a self-evaluation carried out by the HEIs to be

audited. HERQA asks that this should deal with ten focus areas. Another KI from faculty deans noted that:

> *Even though the university college used HERQA's ten focus areas, we have started to adapt TQM model which primarily focuses on customer's satisfaction. HERQA lacks quality assurance policy and Quality assurance framework that could provide HEIs with general direction. Ten focus areas of HERQA alone could not serve as a framework. Of course, this national QA agency has facilitated trainings for us based on our request and provided us some important QA documents.*

This key informant argued that HERQA's efforts to disseminate and publicize best practices or the status of HEIs after quality audit have not been adequate. In addition, HERQA has no authority to take measures and to give timely feedback on the performance of higher education institutions.

4.5.3.2. Accreditation and its impact

In Ethiopia, accreditation refers to a process of quality control and assurance whereby an institution or its programmes are recognized as meeting the minimum accepted standards for offering college and university level education. Accreditation is not mandatory for the public colleges and universities because they have been established under their respective act of parliament, giving them autonomy in governance and quality assurance. There is no obligation for programme and institutional accreditation in public universities. Private higher education institutions, on the other hand, have to go through a licensing and accreditation process (HERQA, 2006 & 2009: 15, 45). One KI from AUC mentioned that "*Accreditation is mandatory for private colleges and universities and their programmes must be approved by HERQA. The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency is the sole accrediting and quality assurance body and is concerned with accrediting private higher education institutions but not public higher education*."

The process of accreditation starts from the self-evaluation report of the institution and involves submission of the self-evaluation report, and appraisal of the self-evaluation report by HERQA experts (field visit by HERQA experts). After analyzing the submitted documents

and conducting a site visit, the body will issue a pre-accreditation permit, provided that the private institution meets the minimum standards set by the Ministry of Education. The Academic Vice president of the UC argued as follows on the question raised by the researcher about why accreditation was limited to private HEIs:

> *I think, at the beginning private HEIs had no human and financial resource and infrastructure, the public HEIs given these materials and human resources by the government. The government has a doubt on private HEIs, and imposed on us an accreditation system to control our performance. After some years we will be equally accredited, the government will change its mind because public HEIs will not be competent without having accreditation system. Now the top management of the public universities are not committed themselves to implement comprehensive QA system in their institutions. They have to be accountable for the money that the government is spending. After some years public HEIs require accreditation.*

The KI suggested that

> *Our governing bodies like HERQA and the TVET Agencies actually do not allow any institution to launch any programme unless the institution gets pre-accreditation or accreditation and renewal of accreditation. So, whenever they need an accreditation or renewal of accreditation for a programme, they always maintain certain standards that our governing bodies have already set. In doing so, they maintain quality of education. To explain further, for example, take one programme, we are supposed to fulfil the minimum standard requirements for inputs, for processes, and certain highlights or indications for the output. After it is accredited, this programme has to be again renewed in every certain interval of time. According to the KI, the implementations of accreditation process by national QA agency have positive and negative impact on the performance of the UC.*

Regarding the impact of accreditation on Admas University College, the ideas of the interview respondents are summarized as follows: accreditation requires self-assessment

and external review which finally leads to good quality assurance practices, and develops and sustains a quality culture. Accreditation also requires regular internal staff meetings, while top managers' commitment to discharge their responsibilities increases in order to guide and help the UC to conduct a meaningful self-study. The follow-up strategies of the QA agency and continuous interaction between the agency and the UC and the self-assessment exercise within the UC brought about a comprehensive internal QA system, created committed managers, the working environment of the UC changed, and teaching-learning practices of the UC improved. However, according to the view of one KI from top management of the UC,

> *Accreditation program has a negative impact because it creates tension between academic staff and top management of the UC. There is no incentive for this extra-work (for those who are engaged on internal quality review). Quality audit is considered as*
> *part of teaching-learning process. It also creates tension between the national QA*
> *agency and the institution because accreditation process will lead to permission or deny of accreditation.*

From the above information, we can infer that accreditation is the backbone of good quality assurance practices. Higher education institutions can benefit from the accreditation process. It could also have a negative impact unless the process of accreditation has an incentive system for those professionals who are involved in internal and external quality audit.

4.5.**4. Themes related to internal quality audit**

4.5.4.1. Trends in internal quality assurance systems

The AUC vice president shared the institution's own view of the definition of quality:

> *The word quality actually was derived from a [Latin] term called Quails, which Means what kind of? so, perhaps, it may refer to literally speaking what kind of thing or what kind of excellence or what kind of element the product might have or might entail. Anyway, the word quality is actually the most debated term to define and it is defined recently by different scholars. They view it from different*

> *perspectives and as a result of this, it appears very difficult to put short and clear definition of quality. But for our sake, quality is fitness for purpose, meaning, all private or Government Higher Education institutions have purpose or objective. Their objectives are actually stipulated clearly in the proclamation of higher education. So, if we fulfil these objectives up to the standard, we might claim that we maintain quality.*

As indicated in the internal quality audit report, quality is firmly embedded in both the vision and mission of Admas University College. The UC, in its five-year strategic plan, has clearly indicated the provision of best quality and relevant education and training as one of its main strategic goals. In addition, it has set out both directions and an implementation schedule for the achievement of this strategic goal. The QA office director pointed out that:

Quality Assurance system emerged in our university college before 2003 (before the establishment of HERQA in 2003). In 1996 EC quality Assurance department was established at UC level because of two reasons, (1) as a private HEI, we know that the existence or sustainability of our UC is based on the quality of education we provide to the society. It is a matter of survival; it is market-based education system; (2) to maintain the national and international standards to enhance the quality of our education.

The UC has developed a quality assurance manual based on HERQA's ten focal areas for institutional audit. The self-evaluation document confirmed that the manual was intended to guide the actions of the management and the whole UC community towards the achievement of excellence in education. Further, it has developed documents such as an internal quality audit procedure and concomitant documents such as an annual internal quality audit programme preparation form. There is also a functional quality assurance structure. The UC has set up two organs for the purpose of leading and controlling the development and implementation of quality assurance activities. These are: a quality assurance standing committee of the senate, which is sometimes referred to as the Quality Assurance System Implementation Task Force, and a Quality Assurance Department (ARD & QAD). The QAD was established in March 2006. It is a unit headed by a full-time expert under the direct supervision of the senate through the vice president for academic affairs. The institutional Quality Assurance Implementation Task Force comprises a team selected from all units of

the university college community including campus deans, academic department heads, instructors, administrative staff, ARD and QAD personnel and students.

The QAO directorate is accountable to the president's office and heads the Academic and Administrative units.

The endeavour of assuring quality of education actually started when Admas UC was established, but it has had more impetus since 1996 EC. By then, they established a full-fledged Quality Assurance office. As a result, they were able to develop different guidelines, manuals, and other dos and don'ts to maintain quality. Consequently, they were also able to include the trends of quality assurance in their strategic plan. The QA director viewed the issue as follows:

> *I can say now, we have, I think, an exemplary quality assurance practice, Quality assurance office. The Quality Assurance department is led by an assistant professor who is accountable directly to the president office which might make us different from other higher educational institutions in Ethiopia. Because many of the quality assurance offices, departments, or what so ever are directed by the Academic Vice president. The fact why we made this office be accountable to the president is because the administration and other wings have also to give meticulous consideration to quality and this office is made to be independent of other wings so as to play strong role to the extent of monitoring and maintaining quality even on what is being done by the president, and if possible beyond the level of the president's office. In other words, it was made to have freedom and autonomy to exercise good practices over the overall activities of the university college.*

According to him, under this office there were three to five experts. At department levels, QA committees were established led by department heads. The members of the committee include: student representatives, carefully selected instructors, and representatives of administrative units. The role and responsibilities of the institutional QA office include:

> *Check how much the UC QA system matches with national and international QA systems / standards;*

Coordinate and lead the tasks of QA office of the UC;

Conduct and lead internal assessment, evaluation and submit the finding reports, including improvement plans by developing instruments for assessment in QA;

Conduct a base line survey for quality and relevance of the curriculum as well as programmes for effective teaching and learning of the UC in collaboration with faculties of the UC; and

Coordinate the specification of minimum standards for the input, process and output or the products (graduates of the academic programmes of the UC).the vice president of the university college elaborated that, pertaining to internal QA procedures, at the beginning the UC QA office had built the capacity of both academic and administrative staff in the form of short-term training on different QA issues. After all things were done, the QA office focused on monitoring the performance of both academic and administrative units through formal and informal means based on the manual, guidelines set by the UC and the action plan of the units. The QA office assesses the effectiveness of the system by discussion with the department / different academic and administrative units because the QA system is not limited to academic units; it includes the other administrative units. The internal quality assessment could be conducted monthly, sometimes before a month, and sometimes after a month. It depends on the urgency of the issue. This internal quality assessment identifies the strength and weaknesses of the institution. After a thorough discussion with the faculty and the department on the problems raised, the problems / gaps indicated are distributed to academic and administrative units by feedback memo for improvement and continuous follow up. During the second round of quality assessment, the quality reviewers' start from the first gap created / identified problems.

Another KI from faculty deans noted that

Our campuses and our departments conduct internal quality audits based on certain criteria extracted from the HERQA, (HERQA's models and working documents). These internal quality audits help in two ways. The first one is, they help the institution to check its status in terms of quality, its strengths and weaknesses, areas of enhancement, areas of improvement. We are committed and actually check ourselves based on the reports of the internal audits without sending this internal audit to external bodies. We use it to fill our gaps if there are and we get improved. Second, the purpose of this internal audit is its service for external auditors. Whenever external auditors are in need of knowing our status, we send it to them. By doing this, we might gain further exchanges of information according to the external requirements.

He explained further that HERQA audited about nine government and five private higher educational institutions in 2008. "What we did was that we first prepared our internal audit. We voluntarily asked them to audit our performances. Then, they sent a certain team of specialized professionals to exhaustively audit our hitherto performances." The team of experts took quite a long time to audit every activity of the university college and gave their feedback reports. Their first activity was to prepare an enhancement plan, as he said, to fill perhaps the possible gaps observed in the external audit report and enhances what have been considered as areas of strength of the university college to maintain them in a better way. This enhancement plan is essential because not only does it fill in the gap observed and enable them to build on their strengths but it also enables them to see where they belong. Another KI argued that:

The first thing is every one of us is required to be so sensitive to quality of education in general. We shall not see this as something sponsored by the government bodies. It is for that matter a matter of existence. To be or not to be, the point is that we must be sensitive to quality of our activities is the first thing. The second is, we are supposed again to be aware of the quality premises of the university college while the university college has put in its legislation, strategic plan, and its annual plan about quality issues. The third point is, we ourselves have to work in line with quality standards. It begins with

working in a principled way for instance. Serving as public servants, we are supposed to serve the public diligently, with the best service that we can deliver. So, it starts from each one of us so, let's be quality ourselves.

Therefore, the participants of the interview concluded that quality is a priority area for their institution; top management of the university college is aware of the benefits of having a comprehensive QA system and the UC benefited from both external and internal quality review.

4.5.***4.2. Development, approval and revision of courses***

In AUC, each department has its own curriculum committee and departmental council. Both of these have a mandate in designing and approving programmes. According to the view of the academic vice president, the departmental committee considers new programmes and may suggest a workshop. It makes a recommendation to the departmental council, which in turn passes its recommendation through the department head to the academic commission. After deliberating on a proposal, the academic commission may approve a workshop in which both internal (instructors, students, academic leaders) and external stakeholders (professional experts) participate in assessing the proposed programme. Thereafter, the programme may be revised and finally submitted to the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC) of senate. The ASCRC will then recommend an acceptable programme to the senate for ratification.

One of the major issues in curriculum development and course approval was the systematic regular review and revision. The university college had a system for regular curriculum monitoring and periodic evaluation and review against set criteria. As one KI elaborated, "*right now, there is no regular reporting to the UC as such from the faculty or department, as far as the quality issue is concerned. However, it does not mean that the curriculum is not being revised or not developed. It means that there is no regular and formal reporting mechanism on how to revise and when to revise the existing curricula. I think that is a big challenge for us*."

4.5.4.3. Teaching - learning process

I conducted an intensive interview regarding the teaching and learning activities in their respective portfolios with the academic vice president of the University College, the QA director, and faculty deans. Their ideas are summarized as follows: The university college has a useful teaching-learning delivery guideline. This addresses the role of the instructor, learning strategies, active learning methods, classroom management, effective teaching, characteristics of good teaching, planning, and teaching students with special needs. Consideration should also be given to using the guideline as a basis for the development of a policy document that would determine how teaching and learning should be undertaken.

In addition to teaching formal classes, members of staff are expected to provide academic counselling and support to students. Good teaching needs to be accompanied by good materials to help support student learning. The SED (2009) reports that the University College provides practical lab manuals to support the teaching and learning process, the AUC regards the active teaching-learning approach as mandatory. Their effort to ensure active teaching and learning is mainly realized through employing different active learning methods. Along these lines, the AUC was working hard to realize its students' active learning in all possible ways. The Academic Vice president of the UC stated that

> *Active learning is not only a set of activities, but an attitude on the part of the instructors and the students that make learning effective. Our University College's practical commitment towards realizing our students' active learning is demonstrated through incorporating course specific active learning method in the curricula. Preparing different timely refresher trainings and workshops on pedagogical skills for our instructors, and employing different methods in the actual teaching learning process*

Other faculty deans indicated that, right from the very beginning, AUC's curriculum for each programme was designed to encompass different active learning methods that could be employed for each course. The practical utilization of the active learning methods specified in each course outline is evaluated by the staff in the departmental council's meetings and by students in the monthly joint meetings of campus deans and student representatives. Regarding the above efforts, the UC offers its staff short-term training and workshops on

pedagogical skills. The training and workshops on active learning methods and continuous assessment and other related topics occur at least once in a semester. The business faculty dean commented as follows:

> *Our experience which shows our students engagement in active learning practices is what our accounting major students did. The students were made to visit different business organizations engaged in services, merchandising and manufacturing. In group, students made to collect annual financial statements of each organization they have visited. Then, each member in a group is made to be a specialist about one element of the financial statement of the organization.*

He added that another mechanism to ensure the quality of teaching and learning in Admas University College was the evaluation of academic staff. In some faculties, evaluation of teaching staff took place in mid-semester and at the end of every semester, not on a regular basis. Reports were generated and then communicated to the staff. The department obtains feedback from the students and takes remedial action. One faculty head commented that student feedback was sometimes unreliable: **"***Sometimes, we do not get genuine comments from the students. In practice, the forms are given towards the end of the class period. The students tick mark and send the form back as quickly as possible. Hence feedback and reality do not match so well*".

From the above data, we can conclude that AUC maintains the quality of their teaching and learning by implementing an active learning approach, through evaluation of academic staff, academic counselling and support, by providing training to develop the pedagogical skill of instructors, and through discussion with students and students' representatives.

4.5.4.4. Research and publication

One of the criteria for judging the quality of university performance is the level of research output, both in terms of quality and quantity. AUC has a policy that encourages research and publishing by staff. As indicated in the internal quality assurance report of 2011, one of the mission statements of the UC concerns research, consultancy and community service. It states that the university college has a mission to undertake research that helps to solve the

socio-economic problems of the country and that can also add new value and knowledge to society, such as to render consultancy and short-term training services to business, government and non-government organizations and to help them accomplish their objectives.

The university college has a research and publication policy and guidelines as well as short-term guidelines. The UC's research and publication department is accountable to the academic and research vice president, in a vertical relationship with the UC QA office, and has mechanisms for considering the funding of research proposals. The following is a sample of views from the research and publication director:

> *The quality of research and publication determines the quality of education in the UC. Teaching- learning process is inseparable from research and publication. Research plays a significant role to improve the teaching-learning process in any institution. Research has been one way of confirming the implementation of policies, trainings, methodologies, guidelines and procedures. It helps us to study the real environment and helps to improve the teaching- learning process. Therefore, maintaining the quality of research in an institution is indispensable.*

Each campus, college and department is expected to perform the research activities in line with the policy and guidelines of the UC. Research and publication committees were established at faculty and department levels; at campus level, one quality assurance coordinator had been assigned.

According to the view of the research and publication director, the UC instructors have been actively involved during the last two years in annual national conferences and symposiums as well as monthly seminars. National annual conference priority has been given to UC instructors (two papers for each department). When they present a paper at national conferences (in a team or individually), the UC will give them an honorarium (10,000 birr) and certificate. In addition to national annual conferences, they also have an opportunity to participate in monthly seminars at UC level. Instructors can present research findings, concept papers, literature reviews or share experiences from training in monthly seminars.

On the last Friday of each month, the university college instructors present their own work. This programme encourages research. Every academic staff member is required to participate /attend the seminar at least five times in a year and to present a mandatory research paper within a year (25% of the research duty). The UC rewards the best researchers in the form of academic ranks up to assistant professor and a salary increment.

Arranging national conferences / symposiums for students is another important issue in Admas UC. In these national conferences priority is given to students from the UC who are competent in their research work (the best three students' papers from the UC are selected). The UC also invites students from other universities to this conference. The UC has established links with international universities and prepared international conferences, for example with Manchester and Lubek Universities in collaboration with Addis Ababa University and New Generation University College (NGUC). They got funds from this linkage (from NGOs) and created a positive attitude among the staff towards research.

An average of about 10-15 research papers (for te national conference) is expected every year individually or in a team (Admas UC encourages instructors to conduct research in a team rather than individual work). This is to develop a research culture in the UC society. Each year an instructor is expected to participate (present a paper) either at the national conference or a monthly seminar. Nobody is allowed to be free of research in the UC, at a minimum he/ she is expected to participate in a seminar. When the number of research papers to be presented increases at national conferences or monthly seminars, the research and publication department urges the instructors to present in a team or facilitate a seminar twice a month. The Dean of the College of Business and Economics commented that when an academic staff member attends training from another institution or organization, the trainee is expected to submit a written report and the Research and Publication Department facilitates a seminar or workshop through which s/he can share the experience with other academic staff. This is part of the monthly seminar and is one of the good aspects of the UC.

4.5.4.5. Commitment of top managers to QA

Quality was considered to be a responsibility of each and every member of the staff and management of the university. The staff members were committed to undertake their roles effectively and efficiently and demonstrate a willingness to improve existing practices and to

be innovative. Deans, directors, campus deans and administrative managers were also responsible for quality in their particular portfolios. The academic vice president of the institution, who was ultimately responsible for the academic issues of the UC, was committed to its implementation.

As one academic manager stated, the teaching staff with whom they worked found that lack of time was a problem. “We make the time, but the people we are working with are busy; they have student issues; they have got staffing issues and so forth. So often they are reluctant to participate but once we start we like to keep the ball rolling and the momentum going.”Quality assurance systems are also about clear communication. One participant observed the taken-for-granted nature of the transmission of decisions at the University College. The importance of leadership in promoting quality within higher education was stated by this participant: “the AUC top managers feel the responsibility; they understand that without a comprehensive QA system, maintaining quality of education is unthinkable”. Because of the efforts made by the university college, the QA system was developed in the university before the government put pressure on HEIs to establish the system in their respective institutions. Currently, the university college has upgraded the QA system from a QA department to a QA office that is run by a QA director. The institutional QA office is accountable to the UC president’s office, under the close monitoring of the university president and closely supported by the president’s office. This indicates that the university college gives high attention to the QA system in the institution.

The QA office has one director and three other QA experts who are fulltime employers in the area. The quality assurance office also receives financial support. They have their own regular budget assigned by the UC from the internal revenue. One KI from QAO explained the commitment of the UC as follows: “*The top management of the UC was highly committed for QA system to be implemented. Some of the indicators were: the establishment of comprehensive QA system in the U C; assignment of full time QA directors and experts who are well paid. The QAO has been accountable to the University president for close monitoring and support; adequate resources were assigned for the implementation of QA system.*” However, the interviewee did not want to explain the commitment of academic staff.

He revealed ambivalent feelings about their commitment on implementing the QA system in the UC.

4.5.4.6. Impact of internal and external QA systems

The impact of quality assurance systems on tertiary education is difficult to assess because it is difficult to isolate the impact of QA from other forces affecting higher education or many other changes which HEIs are experiencing (Askling, 1997; Shah, 1998). One KI from the university college stated the impact of external and internal quality assurance as follows:

> *The establishment of QA system in the UC brought a significant change on the Performances of the U C. This includes: the UC academic and administrative management systems, teaching – learning process, assessment systems are changed. Each manager of the UC, academic staff and students aware of the concept of quality, how to assure quality, the benefits of quality assurance and committed to the tasks assigned to them. It built a huge competence and developed potential in human and material resources at the UC level. It also initiated the UC to work for excellence, to exceed others and enabled the UC to be an exemplary for other private and public HEIs.*

Another argument given by the UC quality assurance office director was that, thanks to the introduction of a quality assessment system established at national and institutional levels, more attention was given to the teaching function within the institution, to talk about teaching, to monitor teaching. However, it was suggested that time devoted to monitoring of teaching is at the expense of time dedicated to teaching itself. The KI further explained that outstanding improvements have occurred in the teaching environment. These include: curriculum made relevant to the needs of the society, improvement of students' assessment, pedagogical skill of instructors also improved and responsibility for improving quality in teaching and learning at individual, academic unit, faculty and institutional levels. The quality of the work process of the UC was improved / changed – the academic, non-academic staff and top managers of the UC committed to their own duties struggled to implement their action plans. The QA system became the culture of the UC; overall, the emergence of the new system had a significant impact on teaching and learning, assessment, and research and service delivery

of the UC. A huge human and material potential has been built for the UC, the working culture of the university and the attitude of people have also changed.

4.5.4.7. Graduate links and competency assessment

It has been a long time since learning institutions began to create links with their graduates through different ways: recruitment services, alumni links, conducting competence gap analysis, tracer studies, etc. As indicated in the experience at Admas (2011: 5) and interviews with the UC quality assurance office director, AUC has been working in different ways to ensure the presence of a strong bond with its graduates in the attempts made so far to create links with and assess the competence of its graduates as well as its institutional effectiveness. Accordingly, the Admas Alumni Professional Association (AAPA) was officially established during a conference held at Imperial Hotel on March 8, 2004. The Alumni Association was registered by EFDR Ministry of Justice as per the Association Registration and Regulations, Legal notice No.321 of 1966. The KI stated that:

> *The regular day time students and extension as well as distance mode graduates are the beneficiaries of the recruitment service. In addition to recruiting its graduates constantly, the UC has also created links with more than 238 potential employers. These links have helped many graduates to be sent to the organizations for employment. The UC also planned to develop website to facilitate employment opportunities to graduates. One of the ways through which the UC ensures its commitment to quality in the education and training service it renders is conducting competence gap analysis and thereby offering extra - trainings to fill any gap observed.*

To determine the effectiveness of the programmes that AUC offers, the surveys undertaken were based on the data obtained from two sources. The first of these was graduates themselves, as their comments are vital in helping the UC improve the programmes and services. The second respondents were employers. Tracer studies and baseline surveys were conducted to evaluate the overall services the UC is rendering. Based on this baseline survey feedback, enhancement plans were prepared by the university college.

Generally, Admas University College is one of the known accredited and externally audited private higher education institutions. In Admas UC, the endeavour of assuring quality of education actually started at their inception. But they have made more progress since 1996 EC. By then, they had established a fully-fledged quality assurance office. Therefore, the top management of the UC was highly committed for the QA system to be implemented. The QA system was genuinely implemented in practice, and not merely symbolically. This study has drawn the conclusion that the AUC implemented quality assurance adequately.

4.6. JIMMA UNIVERSITY (JU)

4.6.1. Background of the university

Jimma University (JU) is one of the public higher learning institutions founded as full-fledged university in 1999 by amalgamation of the then Jimma College of Agriculture (established in 1952) and Jimma Institute of Health Science (established in 1983), both of which are located in Jimma town. Ambo College of Agriculture, which is situated in Ambo town, is also affiliated to JU as of May 2003 (SED, 2008: 3). JU is one of the pioneer national universities well known in rendering innovative community-based education. It is moving forward setting its own vision, mission, goals and core values that comprise the current felt needs of the community and the foreseen trends in the global market. Jimma University is organized into two colleges, eight faculties and a school of graduate studies. These are: Jimma College of Agriculture and Veterinarian Medicine [JUCAVM], Faculty of Public Health, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Faculty of Business and Economics, Faculty of Technology, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Faculty of Natural and Information Sciences and School of Graduate Studies. With the exception of the Faculty of Law, all of these faculties /colleges incorporate departments.

According to the university Academic Programme Officer (APO), the quality assurance system was established in the university in 2005. At the beginning, the quality assurance system had a direct link with the Academic Program Officer (APO) and Academic Development and Resource Centre (ADRC). The quality assurance committee was established at the institutional and college levels. The committee is known as Curriculum Standardization and Review Committee. This committee is composed of professionals from various disciplines with the APO as the chairperson. It is obligatory that every curriculum

designed and/or reviewed in the university should pass through this committee for endorsement by the senate. As quality assurance mechanism, this committee has been found very helpful in the overall maintenance of quality in the department.

Development of institutional self-evaluation [SED] began in February 2007 with the establishment of a self-evaluation team. The team was composed of ten members and the selection of individuals was based on the criteria set by the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) documents in consultation with the Academic Development and Resource Center [ADRC] staff of the university.

4.6.2. Major quality assurance themes from Jimma University

Mindful of the St Mary's and Admas University College case studies, I decided that a more meaningful and perceptive approach would be to present and focus the findings from the Jimma university case study under themes and follow a pattern similar to the St Mary's and Admas University College case studies. Hence, the interview data (supported by relevant official documents from the University College and National Quality Assurance Agency) revealed several emergent themes identified for discussion in this case study. The themes were necessarily limited to the scope of the specific research questions of the study and the questions prepared for semi-structured interview and document analysis. These themes are grouped under two main groupings: external quality audit (EQA), with reference to national quality audit by National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA); and institutional quality audit (IQA) with reference to internal quality review by internal quality auditors of the university.

4.6.3. Themes related to external quality audit

4.6.3.1. The role and impact of external QA systems

The introduction of new national external evaluation procedures has caused some institutions to pay much less attention to their own internal accountability procedures, thus leading to a compliance culture. This seems to be particularly true when the external agency is perceived as being formalistic and bureaucratic (EUA, 2010: 13). A fundamental question in relation to the development of QA systems at national level and in higher education is whether they have any impact on the quality of higher education, in particular the quality of

teaching and learning. The establishment of EQA caused academic institutions to give greater attention to issues of effective teaching and learning (El-Khawas et al. 1998: 34).

The impact of the national quality audit on Ethiopian HEIs is that, audits have resulted in the development of a structure of institutional quality work. As indicated in the HERQA audit report of 2009, students' feedback and regular meetings at programme level with instructors and students are more helpful to quality than such formal procedures. This supports the view that external review is more effective when it is seen to be secondary to the internal process of the institution itself. It has been suggested that external quality monitoring may be effective in the short run in "getting quality on the agenda of institutional management". This short-term impact fails to ensure a long-term ongoing response for quality improvement. One KI from faculty deans viewed the impact of EQA as follows: "*In practice, rather than having a transformative impact, external quality monitoring created an initial shock reaction to HEIs, but that it gradually translates into process of ongoing improvement at the end because the experience and trainings we receive by external QA System, EQA can enable HEIs to adjust themselves to the new reform and international practices*."

Another KI from faculty deans commented:

> *At the beginning of the internal and external quality review most of the university instructors were happy and positive about the current QA practices; it create a sort of competition among the faculties, departments and academic staff. Academic staff was very passionate to practice the system. However, this motivation of academic staff gradually reduced, changed into resistance, they developed negative attitude towards the current practices of QA system.*

According to the university QA director, in the context of Jimma University quality education was defined as "fitness for purpose" or "minimum threshold standards". Even though the structure of QA offices was established at institutional and faculty levels, there were no institutional QA policies and set standards. The university did not use a QA model or quality framework. According to this KI, very few institutional quality reviewers had taken training by the government (HERQA) or the institution. Hence, they did not understand how to set quality standards and select models, which is very important for internal quality audit. The

institution was considering the implementation of a Balanced Score Card (BSC) QA model but this model was not yet practically implemented. This may be because of inadequate training, experience and the absence of a national QA policy and framework. There was no adequate professional support and timely follow-up on the part of HERQA. The idea was explained by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences as follows:

> *HERQA's professional support and follow-up, dissemination of best practice, nationally set policies, providing training for internal quality reviewers are not adequate, most of the trainings (prepared by HERQA and non-government Organizations) are only focused to QA Directors. There was no involvement of institutional quality reviewers and academic staff in the training. HERQA experts had not enough knowledge in this area. We have been struggling alone without the support of national and international experts.*

The KI further suggested that the impact of external QA systems on teaching and learning, research and student assessment was not significant. It is difficult to discern the impact of the EQA system from other factors; other organizational factors also contributed to these developments, including BPR reforms. Of course, currently, internal QA systems exist at institution and faculty levels. The internal quality review started and was conducted in 2007 and 2011 but not on a regular basis. Quality is considered as important on institutional agendas. All these probably resulted from the pressure of EQA. Another negative impact raised by faculty dean was that the emergency of a establishing a QA system created tension between top managers and academic staff. Academic staff perceived the QA system as a process that could overburden them and create pressure, overloading the academic staff in relation to continuous assessment and the active learning approach. The absence of incentives for the extra work (quality audit activities) also aggravated the tension between academic staff and top management of the university.

4.6.4. Themes related to internal quality audit

4.6.4.1. Trends in internal QA system

Quality assurance processes are something tangible and manageable by institutional decisions and form one key component of a culture of quality. In some contexts, internal QA

processes are seen as the procedure that aims to prepare the institution or the programme for an external evaluation (preparing the self-evaluation process) or the monitoring tasks assigned to a specifically established quality unit (DAAD, 2011: 78).

As indicated in the JU university self-evaluation document, and according to the majority of the KIs of the university, at the beginning when the QA system was established in JU, an internal quality assurance system was directly linked with the Academic Program Officer (APO) and the Academic Development and Resource Centre (ADRC). Thus, the university APO and ADRC were the coordinators of QA in the university. The heads of APO and ADRC were interviewed about the presence of a quality assurance policy and system at the university, faculty, department levels and the results are briefly highlighted below.

Although, as they noted, the policy is still in the process of being endorsed by the senate, it is clear that the quality assurance policy directs the process at various levels; hence its importance in shaping the quality improvement effort of the university is paramount. With this assumption in mind, a national draft quality assurance policy was prepared in July 2005 in one of the EQUIP-HERQA joint workshops organized in Addis Ababa, where coordinators and vice coordinators of ADRC from the nine public universities and HERQA experts actively participated in the process. Following this, the APO coordinator noted that the quality assurance policy was prepared by the quality care unit of ADRC and presented to the Senate for discussion.

The academic programme officer confirmed the presence of a quality assurance system at the university level and that a QA committee had been established at institutional level. In the context of JU, quality is defined as “fitness for purpose”. The QA committee is known as the “Curriculum Standardization and Review Committee”. This committee is composed of professionals from various disciplines; the APO acts as the chairperson. It is obligatory that every curriculum designed and/or reviewed in the University should pass through this committee for endorsement by the senate. Apart from this, faculty heads of the university mentioned the presence of quality assurance systems at the university, faculty and department levels. However, the practice is not common across faculties and departments. As indicated in the self-evaluation document of the university conducted in 2007, the development of institutional self-evaluation began in February 2007 with the establishment of

a self-evaluation team. The team was recruited by the office of the academic and research vice president, as team leader. The team was composed of ten members and the selection of individuals was based on the criteria of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) documents in consultation with the Academic Development and Resource Centre [ADRC], staff of the university, senior academic staff from different faculties, the student support service and the student body and coordinator of ADR. One KI from the deans of faculty explained the issue as follows:

> *Currently, JU has established its own QA system headed by Academic program officer. The office was not independent (QA has no separate office or position). It was merged with Academic program officer (APO). QA system also decentralized to college levels in the name of Academic Remedial Action office. Although QA system established in the university, there is no evidence that indicates the presence of QA manual or guideline prepared and used by the University, HERQA focus areas are serving as QA framework and used by the university.*

The majority of KI from faculty deans indicated that there was no institutional QA policy in Jimma University; they conducted two internal quality audits in 2007 and 2011 based on HERQA's quality standards (ten focus areas of HERQA). The university had no quality manual / guideline before 2011. At the end of 2011, the academic program and quality assurance office in conjunction with experts from different disciplines, especially experts from the pedagogical science department, prepared QA guidelines. These guidelines were approved by the university senate and recently put into effect at university and faculty levels. Now its implementation is undeveloped. According to one KI from the natural science faculty, internal quality audit would have been conducted annually; however, there was inconsistency of internal quality audit between 2007 and 2011. This is because of the inappropriate assignment of institutional QA coordinators. Before the 2011 academic year, the coordinator of QA office was from the health professions; he had no knowledge, understanding, and experience on how to run the QA system in the university, and there were no senior and professional people in place. Hence, internal quality audits were not conducted between 2007 and 2011 and the QA system was weakened during this period. In 2011, the position of

the QA office was given to an appropriate professional from the pedagogical science department supported by experts from the pedagogical science department. Three internal quality reviewers were selected from this department, including the university QA director and others from other colleges, but not necessarily from all colleges.

KIs from the College of Social Science and the College of Agriculture still complain about the selection of institutional quality reviewers. According to them, the selection was not based on merit, seniority, experience and HERQA's guidelines, but on the goodwill of the institutional QA officer who is a chairperson of institutional quality reviewers. Even the existing QA guidelines were prepared by inexperienced academics; the guideline is still problematic. Academic staff did not participate in the preparation and revision of the quality assurance guidelines. They also mentioned that the existing QA office was merged with the Academic program office (called the Academic Program and QA Office), run by only one expert; the office was neither separately established, nor supported by other experts. Another important issue regarding the QA guidelines was the establishment of the Faculty QA office. Before 2011, it was called the Academic Remedial Office, which focused on supporting female students and other academically weak students by giving academic support in the form of tutorial classes, but was not focused on how to assure the quality of education at faculty level. In 2011, when the new guideline appeared, the name changed to the Faculty Quality Assurance Office, which incorporated academic remedial actions.

In general, the quality assurance system was established at institutional and college levels, while quality guidelines were recently prepared but not yet implemented. The implementation of the QA system was in its infancy, while nothing much had been done in terms of implementation. The current activities of the faculty QA offices were confined to remedial action, curriculum development and continuous assessment.

4.6.4.2. Development, approval and review of courses

As indicated in SED of 2011, the development of programmes in JU usually starts from departments/schools. The department/school councils establish a committee to develop the curriculum. In some cases the curricula may be adopted from sister institutions and adjusted to the university's philosophy. In other instances, it may start from making the needs assessment and then developing a new one based on the identified needs. There were also

situations where the basic framework of the programme was prepared centrally and the detail of the curriculum was worked out by the committee.

Most of the time people involved in this activity are experienced senior staff members. The committee will examine the graduate profile, resources required, topics to be covered, course description, sequence and semester distribution of the courses, the nature of the course (whether it consists of lectures, laboratory work, field visits, etc., or a combination), course credit hours, duration of the training, entry and graduation requirements, methods of assessment and quality assurance methods, among other things. The view of the Academic Programme Officer (APO) was captured as follows: *"Once the need is identified and recognized at different levels of the institution, the objectives of the unit are written and brief outline of the content is drawn. This is usually undertaken by the committee of experts established for this purpose. Then the objectives, units and contents, the assessment, resources required, pre-requisites are written in detail*."

After the document is developed, it will be presented to the council for further professional comments. Next, the document will be forwarded to the faculty/college academic commission where a decision is made to hold an internal or national curriculum workshop. In both situations, experts in various disciplines and other stakeholders are involved to enrich the draft curriculum document. The final document is then forwarded to the AVP for endorsement. Before endorsement, the document will be presented to the senate standing committee, Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC). According to JU legislation, this committee comprises the APO, ADRC, CBE office, registrar's office and faculty deans/vice deans. This committee scrutinizes the document to ensure that it is consistent with the philosophy of the university and in line with the government policy and makes final suggestions for approval. Approval of the curricula is done by the senate and then by the board.

In curriculum development and revision, departments played an active role throughout the process. Needs assessment, experience sharing, and resource explorations were some of the major activities in the process. Hence, the approach commonly utilized to open a new programme and/or revise an existing one follows a bottom-up approach. However, two faculty deans confirmed during the interview that on some occasions, curriculum

development and revisions could also occur in a top-down approach, where experts from outside the university prepare the curriculum as a national guide and the department may be obliged to use that as reference in institutionalizing the national curriculum. One KI from faculty deans commented on the idea as follows:

> *In a reality, a number of curricula have been developed with the creation of new course. Most of the curriculums were harmonized, copied or adopted from other universities previously started the course. Name is modified and credit points were also adjusted. The contents either received from internet or copied from already prepared materials. There is no standard at national level and institution levels by which we can check the quality of the curriculum.*

As most interviewed respondents indicated, both internal and external stakeholders have been involved in the process of curriculum development and/or revision. Some of the stakeholders were internal participants from within the institution, such as students, teachers, and higher officials; sometimes, external stakeholders from outside the institution, such as professional experts from various places. Of the various internal stakeholders stated above, students did not participate in the curriculum development and revision of horticulture department programmes. Interview respondents revealed that internal stakeholders, particularly teachers, have been active in the needs assessment; some external stakeholders, such as professional experts from research institutes and sister universities, mostly serve as consultants. Regardless of this, attending workshops is common for both internal and external stakeholders. Among those who participated in workshops included MOH, MOE, MOA, Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), Ethiopian Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association (EHPEA), partner organizations such as the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA), Tulane University and community agents at grassroots level.

Some of the strengths of this focus area include: commonly using a bottom-up approach in curriculum development; equal emphasis on theory and practice in curricular documents; and involvement of different stakeholders in the process of curriculum development and/or revision through needs assessment, consultation, and workshops. Apart from these, lack of addressing wider stakeholders of different groups in the curriculum development process

was one of the weaknesses in this focus area, and a mismatch between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum was a weakness that needs further improvement. For example, some faculties such as technology have a curriculum review committee at the faculty level and some departments such as civil engineering have a course coordinator and course outline and exam approval committee. Hence, before the start of each semester and after preparing exams, instructors will submit their course outlines and exams for approval by the committee. As a quality assurance mechanism, this committee has been found very helpful in the overall maintenance of quality in the department. Furthermore, internal quality assurance is in place in developing new programmes because no programme can be launched without passing through the review stages such as approval by department councils, faculty AC and finally by senate. Although it is not common to conduct reviews after the completion of the programme, one exemplary tracer study was conducted on health graduates of the university in 2004.

4.6.4.3. Quality assurance of teaching and learning

The academic audit has placed the issue of the enhancement of teaching and learning on institutional agendas. It has also helped to clarify responsibility for improving quality in teaching and learning at individual, academic unit, faculty and institutional levels (Dill, 2000: 23; Coates, 2005: 123). As indicated in the institutional self-evaluation document in 2011, some JU academic staff commonly use more teacher-centred methods such as lecturing, whole class discussion, and whole class question and answer. Similarly, some of them use more student-centred methods in some cases, depending on the nature of the course, for example, professional practice courses, laboratory experimental courses, clinical attachments. Still some interviewed respondents pointed out that in some cases they used mixed approaches, that is, both teacher-centred and student-centred methods; for example, in the engineering department, some courses demand the use of lectures, i.e. teacher-centred methods, to convey essential theories, while the course equally requires semester project work and student group work that characterize student-centred methods. The dean of the natural science faculty indicates that

> *Most teachers utilize more of teacher–centred methods, most of the time with some occurrence of mixed methods and more of practice based methods*

based on the nature of the discipline and in some senior courses. In medical faculty for example, most pre-clinical courses are handled using more of teacher-centred methods and almost all clinical course are treated with more of case based practical methods which is an indication of using more of Student-centred methods, in the latter case.

A KI from the social science faculty complemented the above statement about the use of teacher-centred methods. A well-structured lecture was very common. Teacher talk dominates, while the task of the students is confined to passive listening, note taking, and rare involvement in answering very short questions that require them to supply a word or a phrase. When asked to give reasons why they have selected to use those methods, the faculty deans mentioned the following: lack of pedagogic training, large class size, and inadequate credit hours to cover courses, shortage of semester time to finish courses so that even laboratory sessions are used for lecturing purposes. More student-centred methods are suitable for more practical courses such as Bedside Teaching, the Clinical Area, Experimental Laboratory work and Drawing, which usually demand more student participation in the process of instruction. The practice of quality assuring teaching and learning is aptly captured in the interview response given by one of the college deans. In response to whether they had any measures in place to assure quality teaching in his college / department, the college dean responded thus:

Yes we do, I will start with the teaching itself, we have a system in place, the system that we call it peer review where lecturers are obliged to invite colleagues to sit in their lectures and evaluate their teaching and provide a professional support. This report is very useful in terms of appraisals. Peer evaluation assist us determine whether one is doing the teaching properly. In addition to peer evaluation, have got also student evaluation where we require a lecturer to have their course evaluated by students at the end of the semester.

JU classrooms were equipped with LCD and white board, connected with internet; hence, teachers could easily access important documents online and display for students, uploading learning materials including PPT slides to enable students to get access to the materials

before as well as after the session. Some interview participants commented that there were no promising efforts observed in the College of Natural Science as far as Smart Classroom and e-learning issues are concerned. There were even insufficient classrooms and laboratories when compared with the numbers of students. Wireless connections for students who have personal laptop and computer access for developing assignments, term papers and senior papers help students to be smart in computer skills. However, currently there is a mismatch between the numbers of students and computers.

Students' academic advice and tutorial support were the other central elements addressing the quality of teaching in JU. Based on evidence obtained from the faculty deans and QA director involved in this study, it was clear that academic advice was commonly provided based on student demand during research in all the departments. For most departments, there was no official counselling service. All respondents who participated in this study revealed that academic advice and tutorial support are important to maximize student learning. The teachers are all willing to help if approached. However, students do not approach their supervisors for advice. The instructors do not encourage students to contact them either. Most faculty deans indicated that problems encountered in academic advice and tutorial support included exam oriented attitudes of teachers (more inclined towards believing in exams and results), dealing with exam questions during tutorial sessions, and lack of continuity due to the delayed start of the course.

4.6.4.4. Research and consultancy service

As stated in higher education proclamation 650/2009, the focus of research in higher learning institutions should be geared to promoting the relevance and quality of education and the country's developmental issues, focusing on the transfer of technology. To bring a meaningful transformation in teaching and learning, research and community services, JU University was implementing a business process re-engineering (BPR). The business process re-engineering (BPR) had also brought research, publication and extension. The view of the research and publication directorate was captured as follows:

> *We have research and dissemination policy and strategy in JU strategic document. The University has its own Research and publication policy since 2011, until 2011 there was no clear and written research and publication policy. This policy document*

has been prepared to bridge the gap and lay down the policy direction and guideline that will create conducive policy environment to advance research and community based education.

The policy recognizes that a multi-disciplinary research and development approach contributes to producing packages of recommendations that will foster integrated development. The coordination of research and publication is decentralized to college and department levels. The director for research and publication (KI) outlined the process of research as follows: approval of the research work in JU should pass through three sub processes, including review at departmental and faculty research committee level as well as review at university RPC (RPO) level. The review process scrutinizes the methodology, financial requirements and ethical issues, among other things. Though there are few sub processes, there are too many delays. According to him, the research and ethics board can also play the role of monitoring and evaluation to provide professional support. This includes monitoring in the field, laboratory work and evaluating whether the research project is going as per the proposal or objectives. These research and ethical board members are selected from different faculties / colleges.

The university's research and publication policy encourages the engagement of all academic staff in research. However, the research and publication director indicated that only about 1-10% of the academic staff were engaged in research activities. The reasons listed for this low proportion were indicated as: lack of research funding, unattractive environment for research, unavailability of laboratory equipment, chemicals and other inputs, lack of training and research skills, lack of experienced staff for guidance, attrition of experienced staff and poor research culture. According to the self-evaluation document of the university, staff participation in undertaking research was limited as staff members were weighed down by teaching. In terms of quantity, about 25-30 research projects were presented for public defence in 2004 .This varies from college to college. However, following the absence of funds, the number of research projects being carried out in the college was reduced.

As far as efforts to encourage staff to undertake research is concerned, the faculty deans stated that the university uses workshops, conferences and academic commission meetings in order to encourage staff to engage in research activities. Research is incorporated as one

major criterion for teachers' evaluation. Moreover, staff members are encouraged to submit research proposals by posting calls for papers announcements. On top of that, staff members have the possibility to publish their articles. However, the long and tedious bureaucratic procedure for proposal review and fund release remains to be a bottleneck and discouraging for researchers. In this university, researchers disseminate their research output through using the university's annual research conference and other conferences organized by relevant professional associations. The research findings of academic staff and students are also disseminated through local and international journals, the internet, conference presentation, annual symposia and policy briefs. Of the conducted research projects, about 6-10% was published in local journals and 1-5% in international journals.

Concerning quality, faculty deans stated that all projects were multidisciplinary, need driven, problem solving and submitted for funding after being publically defended. These were done in such a way that staff submitted proposals in teams comprising individuals from relevant disciplines, then the College Review Board led by the college CBE, Research and Postgraduate coordinator screened the proposals and arranged for public defence. Promotion as a result of publication, considering research as workload, transparent schedules for proposal submission and public defence were mechanisms used by colleges in encouraging staff for conducting research. In addition, the college has devised the following strategies for maximizing participation of staff in research: the development of a research excellence award, where the best academic staffs in research are nominated for the award in each year. The college has a guiding document for the award, and active encouragement from heads in arranging facilities for the research. The college disseminated its research output to the end users via publishing in journals, presenting at the university's annual research symposium and locally available mass media. For instance, the college was utilizing Jimma Community Radio to teach the community about the production of quality hens, flowers, honey and coffee in the national and regional languages.

Concerning the consultancy service of JU, the academic programme officer and faculty deans were interviewed. The majority of them indicated that they were not involved in any consultancy activities. When asked why JU could not be involved in a consultancy service,

the main reason presented was lack of time to compete on advertised tenders and the inexperience of the staff. So far, there is no clear plan to be involved in such activity except the JU manufacturing centre, which was established in the technology faculty with DIF funding to offer consultancy, among other things. Community Based Education (CBE) is the Philosophy of Jimma University. It is a strategy of achieving and maintaining educational relevance to the community needs. On other hand, it is a means of providing a community oriented education programme. It is a modern approach, for it gives opportunities for students to learn in groups from each other through authentic activities in an authentic environment. It consists of learning activities that use the community extensively as a learning environment, in which not only students but also teachers, members of the community, and representatives of other sectors are actively engaged throughout the educational experience. Hence, the programme is advantageous not only for students but also for teachers and community at large. The strategies of implementing CBE at JU were designed on four main programmes, which are expected to take 20% of the allotted time of the overall curricula: Community Based Training Program (CBTP), Team Training Program (TTP) /Developmental Team Training Program (DTTP), and Community Based Student Research (SRP). The research and publication director stated that:

> *In order to enhance the students' problem solving skill, graduating class students are expected to carry out an independent research project. Because the program focused on problem oriented, community based, scientifically and ethically acceptable and feasible and action oriented. However, currently the CBE is not well accepted by the local community because graduate students from the university visits the local community every year in a large number and called the community to participate in practical work with them. This seems tedious on the part of instructors and the community.*

CBE contributes to enhance the quality of the university education; in general, it has enabled the university to train professionals in diverse fields of study in a community setting, encourage a team approach in treating societal problems, work with the local communities with greater conviction, and undertake problem-based research activities that take into consideration the priority needs of the community. The experience of JU in outreach activities

through CBE was very good. Participation by students and staff alike was also exemplary. As explained by Academic programs and QA office:

> *Since it demands a lot of resource and commitment by all parties, its practicality seems declining from time to time. Increasing number of students, high attrition of experienced staff, problems related to programming the activities, shortage of transportation facilities, multiple tasks to instructors, lack of benefit package for those involved, absence of motivating good work, shortage of budget and time to conduct interventional activities were among the major ones that hinder this very important teaching learning activity.*

4.6.4.5. Quality assurance of student assessment

According to the 2011 assessment policy of JU, in all courses, all course instructors or course teams have to conduct at least three (for Summer/program) or five (for semester based courses) course assessments, excluding the summative or final examination, as part of the continuous assessments in a given semester. Forms of continuous assessment may include tests/quizzes (written/oral), class assignments, class presentations, laboratory reports, essays, seminars, in-class tests, projects, take-home assignments, term papers, practical demonstrations and/or any other elements specified by the instructor/department in the team charter/course outline. The evaluation may be designed to assess the students' performance in groups or individually to provide the required evidence of competency and to maintain regularity and consistency of the assessment of students' performance across departments and provision of early remedial action to identified students so that support actions can be taken on time and students can be assisted to remedy any gaps before the final exam. Students must receive feedback on their performance at least before the next round of assessment. Continuous assessment may take various forms, based on the nature of the course and the recommendation of the course instructor or course teams or the respective department/school. However, course instructors or course teams shall explicitly specify details of the type/form of assessments and course requirements on the course outline to be supplied for the respective students.

All interviewed faculty deans confirmed that all assessments must be carried out on the principle of outcomes-based learning (what learners must know and be able to do). Hence, if

the performance of a student is found to be below the standard/ average (50% of the allotted mark for that assessment) on any form/s of individual or group project work, assignments, term papers, and other forms of assessments (except tests and examinations); s/he shall at least repeat once the same or similar task or be given substitute course work by the respective instructor or course team. In this case as in others, the evidence has to be recorded and reported/submitted. Continuous assessment and formal remedial action shall not be applicable for year round courses (for pre-clinical I and II), clinical courses, internships, thesis and project based courses. These courses will be handled as usual. However, the number and types of continuous assessment shall be improved (increased); procedures, types (nature), timeframes and values of the course assessment shall be clearly stated in the syllabus or course outline and communicated to students at the outset.

In the view of the respondents, the major problems observed in student assessment were: subjectivity, preparing too difficult or too easy exams , relying more on the theoretical aspects of the course than on the practical components, careless invigilators, students cheating (due to large number of students assigned in exam rooms), and lack of control and assessment procedures. In general, JU uses continuous assessment as one major mechanism to improve the quality of education in the institution.

4.6.4.6. Commitment of institutional managers to QA

Developing a quality culture takes time and effort, as it is closely related to values, beliefs, and cultural elements which cannot be changed quickly. Participation of all stakeholders in the implementation of QA processes and striving for a stronger quality culture appear to be essential, but still demand attention from top management of the university (EUA, 2012: 5). The ambition of top management of Jimma University was to ensure quality and to implement a QA system in their university, but in reality, the implementation of the QA system was merely symbolic because of a lack of commitment on the part of top management. One KI reported that the reason for the failure of quality assurance systems was that academic staff had no interest in implementing the new system. They considered that quality activities overburdened them and that internal quality review added extra work for academic staff. Top managers of the university also denied that the QA office needed its own

separate budget and failed to assign appropriate finances and human resources for the institutional QA office up to faculty levels. There was no incentive for academics who were involved in the work of QA in the form of promotion or scholarship; it was not even included in teachers' performance evaluation and due attention was not given to it. The ideas of one faculty dean were stated as follows:

> *The top management of the university put emphasis on QA when MOE (HERQA) put pressure on them. When HERQA and MOE silent about QA, the university also cool down the issue . So the focus of top managers of the university depends on the attention of the state and National Quality Assurance Agency. Once it became a hot issue and then again cools down and again the issue became hot. In general it is not consistent in its implementation. They talk about quality assurance only when the government gives attention to it. They want to implement QA system without any incentives for quality reviewers.*

Therefore, the commitment of the top management of the university was not encouraging. There was no independent QA office, while QA policy and manuals were not developed until 2011. Self-evaluation/ internal quality audit was not conducted as intended. The implementation of the internal QA system was merely symbolic.

4.6.4.7. Graduate survey study

Student surveys (follow-up studies) are predicated on the importance of seeking feedback from students (as customers and clients) to determine their satisfaction. Since students are the only ones who can provide a viewpoint from the immediate recipients, it must be seen as a significant dimension in assessing the quality of a program. Survey studies are undertaken at various stages of the students' experiences whilst studying in the institutions and thereafter (DAAD, 2011: 56).

Considering practices in Jimma University (JU), internal quality assessment conducted in 2007, the subsequent external quality audit in 2008 (HERQA, 2008: 15) and the evaluation of the Business Process Re-engineering Implementation (JU,2011:22), which took into consideration the HERQA's focus areas, demonstrate the University's attempts at assessing the quality of the education it is providing. However, none of these quality assessments

addressed the graduates' effectiveness; such practice demands its own unique approaches of study. Coming to graduate tracer study practice, Assefa, et al. (2004) have examined JU medical doctor graduates' effectiveness in the workplace, where the focus was to look at the usefulness of the Community Based Education program in particular. This study was focused on a single program with a limited area. Thus, a comprehensive graduates' tracer study has not yet been undertaken by the university. In such circumstances, it is difficult for the university to speak openly about the quality and relevance of the education it is offering without tracking down graduates from diversified fields in diversified areas and assessing their competencies in a real workplace.

In general, conducting graduate tracer studies helps to provide valuable information about the effectiveness of graduates' strengths and shortcomings in their educational programs. In this way, graduate tracer studies provide significant relevant information for higher learning institutions that may be used for minimizing any possible deficits in a given educational program in terms of content, delivery and relevance and for further development of the institution in the context of quality assurance (Schaumburg, 2003, 56). Against this background, Jimma University has incorporated the need for conducting a comprehensive graduate tracer study in its annual plan for the 2010/2011 academic calendar. The study has been initiated by the university as per its annual plan. This tracer study is delimited to graduates of a regular first degree offered by the university in the academic years 2005/6 to 2009/10 or 1998-2002 EC. The study program addresses and detects the discrepancy between the programs and market demands of the world of work, and the general teaching standard of the university. Graduates' knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes about the specific job for which s/he is recruited is assessed to determine the graduates' and employers' perceptions about the competence of the graduates. Employers', peers' and graduates' satisfaction will be surveyed to indentify the relevance and quality of the programs provided by the university. The perceived strengths and areas for improvement of study programs and CBE will be scrutinized in order to identify the pressing areas for improvement for possible immediate action. The survey will be carried out in the three major regional cities (Adama, Bahirdar, and Awassa) and their surrounding zonal and district towns and city administrations: Addis Ababa and Diredewa. The survey study includes 31 fields of study that have recent graduates and are still running the same program.

In conclusion, in Jimma University, the QA office (QAO) was established in 2005. The QAO consists of the director and the quality assurance committee. QA coordinators have also been assigned at faculty level. The university has planned a QA system that focuses on improving the teaching-learning process, research and community service, curriculum and relevance (used modular approach) and student assessment. The QAO is responsible for providing overall strategic direction on QA management mechanisms for the institution, establishing a plan for QA implementation and completing quality assessment activities and reporting the work finished for the university senate and national QA agency for external audit every five years. One quality committee was also set up to manage and support the process at the university level. The members of the committee were delegated from each faculty or college. The committee works under the coordination of the quality assurance office. According to the mandate, the QAC was supposed to evaluate and improve the quality management systems of all institutional activities. Although the system had already been established in the university, they had only conducted an internal quality audit in 2007. Therefore, the current quality management system cannot be marked as operating comprehensively. The meaningful part of the QA system implementation works only symbolically and not genuinely in practice.

4.7. HAWASSA UNIVERSITY (HU)

4.7.1. Background of the university

The historical background of HU goes back to its beginnings in 1976 as the Junior College of Agriculture under Addis Ababa University, offering a two-year diploma course with specializations in Plant Sciences, Animal Sciences, Agricultural Engineering, and Home Economics. In the 1990 and 1991 academic years, two departments launched a four-year degree program in Plant Production and Dry-land Farming, Animal Production and Rangeland Management, and a five-year program in Agricultural Engineering and Mechanization. From this visionary beginning, combined with a strong commitment by the management, the staff and the supportive environment, the program has evolved to become one of the strong National Universities in Ethiopia. Hawassa University (HU) is a comprehensive university, with a wide range of academic and professional programs and an increasing number of undergraduate and graduate students.

The university is organized in seven colleges and two institutes, situated on four campuses. The College of Forestry and Natural Resources is at Wondo Genet campus, 37 km from Hawassa, while the remaining three campuses are in Hawassa. They are the College of Agriculture campus, the oldest in the University, the College of Health Sciences, and the main campus. The main campus accommodates four colleges: Natural Sciences, Social Science and Humanities, Law and Governance, Business and Economics, and two institutes: the Institute of Technology and the Institute of Educational Training and Research. The University offers over 60 fields of study at undergraduate level and 41 graduate programs in agriculture, forestry, natural sciences, social sciences and health (SED, 2008: 10). In the University-wide strategic plan, the University has been undertaking a wide range of research and extension activities in collaboration with national and international organizations in various fields based on the needs and challenges of our society, prospective development constraints and global trends. In order to realize this goal, HU needs to intensify its research performance to a significantly higher level by developing and implementing a focused and translatable research strategy which will require a six-year implementation period (HU Research Strategy, 2010- 2015).

4.7.2. Major quality assurance themes from Hawassa University

In a similar way to the St Mary's, Admas University College and Jimma University case studies, I decided that a more meaningful and perceptive approach would be to present and focus the findings under themes from the Hawassa University case study, following a similar pattern as in the cases of Jimma University, St Mary's University College and Admas University College. Hence, the interview data supported by relevant official documents from the university and National Quality Assurance Agency revealed emergent themes that I identified for discussion in this case study. The themes were necessarily limited to the scope of the specific research questions of the case study and the questions prepared for the semi-structured interview and document analysis. These themes are discussed under two main groupings: external quality audit (EQA), with reference to the national quality audit by the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA), and institutional quality audit (IQA), with reference to the internal quality review by internal quality auditors of the institution.

4.7.3. THEMES RELATED TO EXTERNAL QUALITY AUDIT

4.7.3.1. Lack of national QA policy or framework

The EQA model can be used by the government to make HEIs more congruent with policy preferences. For an institution to deliver a quality education, it needs a policy on quality assurance, an institutional position statement that defines, in explicit terms, the standards to be attained by the institution (what), the methodology / approaches to be used (how) and the parties responsible (who). A quality assurance policy is an institutional values position. The policy statement is not only a commitment by the institution to attain defined standards; it also guides and regulates the activities of all stakeholders within the institution. It directs the various efforts and energies of institutional stakeholders towards a common purpose, and it guides institutional planning efforts, including the allocation of resources. If there is no such policy, institutional activities are not harmonized and people do not feel obliged to do certain things. A lack of policy suggests a lack of commitment on the part of management (Du Vivier, Ellis, & Tumadóttir, 2009). The information received from national QA agency experts and HU QA director and faculty deans indicates that there was no specific QA policy and QA framework at national and institutional levels. As indicated in HERQA's quality audit reports, HERQA's ten focus areas serve as a national QA framework for external and internal quality audits. The national QA experts indicated that they were preparing a national QA policy in conjunction with policy makers. They are currently setting standards / subject benchmarks for health and technology courses at national level; of course they did not deny that as a result of the absence of a national QA policy not all higher education institutions were in a position to prepare their own internal QA policy and implement QA systems.

4.7.3.2. The role of external QA in promoting internal quality assurance systems

Quality audits are collaborative efforts that usually involve the auditee carrying out a critical self-analysis, and an external review team verifying the self report, making recommendations for improvement and following up on the progress. Audits are usually administered at the whole of the institutional level or at the subject level (Harvey & Newton, 2004: 24). Some countries have many quality assurance agencies which themselves need to be reviewed and accredited against national protocol.

In the Ethiopian context, HERQA is the only quality assurance agency that is responsible for conducting external quality audits in both public and private HEIs by its own experts or teams. As indicated in the HERQA quality document in 2010, in all HEIs the pre-requisite for an external quality audit was the submission of an internal quality assessment report by the institution to HERQA. This is the common procedure followed by all quality agencies globally. HERQA conducted an external quality audit in HU for the first time in 2008. As in other HEIs, HERQA studied the internal quality reports of Hawassa University and undertook the external quality audit based on a set of agreed criteria and submitted its report to the concerned body for further action. This called for adequate preparation from the university to establish a quality care system. The university's QAO directorate viewed the role of the external quality audit as follows:

> *In 2008 academic year, when HERQA conducted the first quality audit in our university, things were new; there was no quality assurance office like today. Academic development Resource Centre (ADRC) which was established in 2005 took the responsibility of assuring Quality. At the beginning two members of HERQA undertook a brief visit and explained the arrangement that should be made for the audit and discussed schedule meetings. According to the arrangements made HERQA conducted external quality audit in 2008. At the end, we learned a lot of things from the procedure and report made by external quality auditors.*

The KI further explained that after a brief visit to the university by members of HERQA, on the final day the team met together to agree on findings to be presented to the president and vice presidents. In the end, the EQA team's observation and views on each of the ten focus areas of the institutional quality audit were presented. Following commentary on the focus area based on information provided in the SED and gained during the audit visit, each section ends with commendation and recommendations. Another KI (the social science faculty dean) stated that

> *Our institution didn't conduct internal quality audit from 2007 until yet, there was no follow-up mechanism on the part of HERQA, the top management of the university needs pressure from the top. If MOE/ HERQA gives due emphasis*

on quality issue at different national Conferences and meetings, the top management of the university make quality their top agenda or priority, otherwise they forget the quality issue. Therefore, there should be follow-Up mechanism on the part of MOE and HERQA to increase the commitment of top managers.

As the faculty deans of the university indicated, the role of HERQA was not limited to the EQ audit; they organized training for groups of representatives of the university and quality assurance directors with the help of professors and renowned scholars in the area on different quality issues. However, the effort made by HERQA to provide professional support was not adequate.

4.7.1. Themes related to internal quality audit

4.7.4.1. Trends in internal QA systems

The rise in demand for both internal and external QA processes in Ethiopia has usually been linked to the massification of higher education, the increase of investment and doubts concerning the possibility of maintaining quality in the resulting new circumstances (HERQA, 2003: 12).

As indicated in the HU quality assurance manual, high quality provision has been one of the aims of Hawassa University. The university's vision and mission statements have at the centre the aim of excellence and the development of a culture of quality is embedded in the university's strategic plan. Quality assurance of the university focuses on academic matters and teaching and learning, and links closely with those services which directly support students, such as the library and student services. Quality management targets effective development and monitoring procedures and the quality of administrative sections and services. At the university level, the QA office had recently been established, led by the QA director. The university QA office was accountable to the Academic vice president of the university. As the university's QA office directorate stated:

Quality Assurance director plays a pivotal role in providing strategic direction and in the formal institutional decision-making process. In each college QA coordinators are assigned. There are seven colleges and one academic unit, a

> *total of eight quality assurance coordinators. Academic standards and quality assurance committee is responsible for the educational quality of respective academic units and shall take the prime responsibility of assuring quality of academic programs. The role of institutional QA director is to provide general direction and oversee the implementation of the procedure.*

The QA director was responsible for coordinating the management and supervision of the QA reports in accordance with HERQA requirements and calendar. The responsibilities of college or institute QA coordinators were to: facilitate and organize a roundtable discussion on quality assurance at academic unit (college /school /department) levels, involve all staff and students to promote continual communication and create a conducive learning environment; coordinate training and professional development workshops among the academic units; take a prominent role in the preparation of internal and external quality assurance procedures; prepare and submit periodic reports of the college concerning QA practices to the QA office, and make suggestions on the allocation of resources and provision of incentives to encourage staff and students to maintain and improve educational quality.

In 2011, HU developed its own quality manual as a framework for coordinating the institutional quality management implementation. The university had decided to conduct an internal quality audit in 2007 because of the implementation of BPR (Business Process Re-engineering) in the university and urged by the national QA agency (HERQA). The QA office directorate started the establishment of an internal QA system at the beginning called Academic Programs and QA Office. Later, the top management of the university became aware of the importance of establishing a QA office as an independent unit and the need to separate it from the academic program office. Consequently, in 2009 the QA office became an independent unit with the responsibility of ensuring the quality of education in the university. According to the QA director, only one expert was assigned to coordinate the whole activity of QA in the university. Although the university has three positions in the area, they did not get an appropriate quality expert from the market. They are still waiting for applications for the positions. The Dean of the Faculty of Natural Science supported the idea, and commented as follows:

Now we have established quality assurance system at the university, college and department levels in a new form because before 2011 inappropriate experts were assigned to the position of QAO; the office was not independent; committees established for this purpose was ad-hoc. So our focus is who takes the responsibility to run the QA of the university. Now we have completed everything, the appropriate person is assigned as quality assurance director, college QA Coordinators are assigned; quality audit committees are selected, quality policy and guide lines are prepared, now we can start internal quality audit by next year in 2012.

The university carried out self-evaluation through the university quality audit committee. The sub-committees were formed in each college and department. The committee established at institutional level gave the overall direction and took responsibility for the report writing. Another KI (business faculty dean) responded to the question "How could you ensure the quality of education in your university if the QA system is not functional?" by saying that informal quality evaluation has been conducted through meetings with student representatives, informal visits to the different academic and administrative units of the university, as well as meetings and discussions with the academic and administrative staff (college deans and department heads). In general, the university had established internal QA systems at institutional, faculty, and departmental levels, a QA director and faculty QA coordinators had been assigned, and a QA manual prepared. But the actual implementation of the system was in its infancy. It started in 2007 and then collapsed between 2007 and 2011. This indicates that QA culture was not developed in the institution. It needs the commitment of top managers and follow-up from the national QA agency to develop a workable internal QA system.

4.7.4.2. Development, approval and revision of courses

As indicated in their QA guideline (2010), in HU there were clear procedures and guidelines that were followed in the approval of newly developed courses. The process of approving programs/ courses begins with a department or academic unit, proceeds through the faculty council, goes to the senate standing committee for further discussion, and is ultimately

submitted to senate for final approval. The procedure was further explained by the Dean of the College of Natural Science as follows:

> *A newly developed course goes through various committee structures before it can be approved. After developing a course proposal, an academic submits to the relevant sub-committee in the faculty. The faculty (Academic commission) reviews the proposed course and may recommend or modify the proposal. Approval comes after a series of internal and external review workshops has been conducted at institutional level. If the government forced us to open a new program, we do not go all these processes, we use the existing curriculum from other universities.*

He further explained that academic peers and other stakeholders were involved in the review process so that the university could be assured of the need for the program, the appropriateness of the curriculum and the relevance of the provision. In terms of approval, there were roles for the department council, faculty academic commission and the academic standing committee of the senate. The role and responsibility of this standing committee was to evaluate and revise courses and educational programs in terms of their relevance and societal accountability. The final decision on curriculum approval rests with the senate. The social science college dean noted that

> *The initiator of the curriculum might be the department or team of instructors or the government. If the government is the initiator of the new curriculum, we directly copy the curriculum from sister universities who already started the program, but examine the availability of human and financial resources to continue the program. If the initiator is the department, we should follow the above-mentioned procedure.*

Another important issue regarding curriculum is curriculum revision. As indicated by the QA director and faculty deans of the university, there is no formal periodic evaluation of the courses in the university, which is an important means of assuring quality. They identified the absence of regular quality monitoring through periodic review as the major problem of the

university. They explained that revising the existing curricula required willingness on the part of the academic staff and the department. As one college dean observed,

> *Right now, there is no regular revision of the existing curricula in the university as such in the faculty, as far as the quality issue is concerned. However, it does not mean that curricula are not revised. It means that there is no formal evaluation mechanism. I think that is a big challenge for us. The university should devise a mechanism by which the university can look back the existing Courses. Part of the challenge in developing curricula also arose from the lack of experts and interest among the academic staff.*

4.7.4.3. Quality assurance of teaching and learning

A learner-centred approach is the philosophy of HU and one way of assuring the quality of teaching and learning. In line with this policy of the university, every instructor is expected to use teaching methods that stimulate active learning. However, the SED (2008) and the interviews with faculty deans indicate that the dominant form of teaching in HU was the lecture method. The reasons were stated by one KI as follows:

> *Staff spoke of having no option rather than using lecture method as class size were large. In Some cases student number was larger than what is expected. About 80-90 students were learning in one class room especially in Engineering Technology and Natural science colleges as a result of 70% and 30% student's intake. Most teaching comprises lecture presentations supported by the use of a chalk board and more rarely white boards.*

In terms of teaching approaches, lecturing was the dominant mode favoured for teaching and learning, but it varied across colleges. In Awasa College of Agriculture, demonstration, small group discussions, group assignments, practical attachments, project work, and student presentations were used widely. Even though the policy and the philosophy of the university advocates a student-centred teaching approach as a mechanism to assure the quality of teaching, the most dominate methods of teaching in the university were teacher-centred. The practical attachment element of coursework is to be welcomed as a way of linking theory and practice and providing students with valuable experiences. Practical work forms an important

element of the curriculum of many programs in the university. Practical work was sometimes restricted by the size of the class being taught, so that students had to work in groups of up to ten, with the result that some students were not actively involved. As indicated in SED, there was a shortage of laboratory facilities. This indicates that appropriate learner-centred teaching was not employed in the university. According to the Dean of the Faculty of Natural Science, there are two major factors influencing the teaching and learning activities in the University. One is the size of the teaching groups; the other is the inexperience of the academic staff. The university has no policy on teaching and learning and thus instructors have little to guide them in their approach to teaching.

The KI further explained that, in addition to teaching formal classes, members of the academic staff were expected to provide academic counselling and support to students. "*Departments assign academic advisors to students at the beginning of the academic year. However, vast majority of instructors do not offer a consultation time for academic counselling and support to students*". Evaluation of teaching by students was one of the main internal QA practices at HU. As a policy of the university, every subject and its corresponding teacher were evaluated once every semester. Evaluation of instructors by students was viewed by college deans as an ineffective way of QA practice in the university. There were two opposing views regarding the evaluation of teaching. One faculty dean rated evaluation of teaching of teachers by students as the most effective QA practice in the university: "*I have already received feedback this semester …The feedback is an opportunity to identify students' problems. I do not know whether it is a successful practice (to all). When the feedback is received, individual staff members will scrutinize it and rectify the situation*." A faculty dean who had doubts about the validity of student feedback said:

> *Most of the times we do not get genuine comments from the student's, in practice the forms are given towards the end of the class period (at the last class of the semester). Hence, the students tick mark and send the form back as quickly as possible. Hence, feedback and reality do not match so well. Sometimes we come across poor teachers but we hear of very positive comments concerning that person.*

Academic staff was evaluated by students, heads of department, and colleagues. This was done at the end of each semester. Evaluation by students accounted for 50%, evaluation by heads of department had a value of 35%, and that by colleagues 15%. As confirmed by all interviewed faculty deans, in addition to evaluation of teaching, HU organized meetings with students and with students' representatives from time to time; having discussions with them had proven to be extremely valuable in obtaining feedback about teaching. This can contribute for the quality of teaching and learning in the institution.

4.7.4.4. Quality assuring of student assessment

Student assessment plays a key role not only in evaluating students' level of performance in a given course but more importantly, in encouraging students to learn. HU used continuous assessment as a major assessment method of students' academic performance. The university has a written policy on student assessment, advocates continuous assessment, and instructors have been trained to support this. The university assesses students' performance to improve students' learning, identify instructional or assignment challenges, and to get feedback from students on their performance.

In some courses, students were assessed by a final examination only and so some students had little knowledge of their progress until they discovered that they had failed the examination. The external quality audit report indicates that continuous assessment is widely practised across all colleges of the university. Some of the continuous assessment takes the form of tests, term papers, class presentations, project work, practical reports and assignments. One KI commented on continuous assessment as follows:

> *Continuous assessment is difficult and complex mechanism especially when it is utilized by instructors who are teaching the same course for more than two sections. This requires developing understanding and skills that will help instructors to apply common measurement tool and score objectively. This is possible when training opportunities are provided and guidelines are developed to support the practitioners on the actual work situation.*

According to HU legislation, continuous assessment has received due attention based on its value. This is demonstrated in the modular curriculum under implementation, which allocates 60% to continuous assessment and the remaining 40% to the final examination for each course. But the maximum and minimum number of exercises to be offered in each was not strictly indicated..

Continuous assessment fosters cooperation between the learners and the instructor, especially in the area of learners' class projects. However, sometimes continuous assessment is associated with challenges. Another KI stated that "*the large number of assessments learners has to go through and the large number of mark records instructors have to make is one among the main challenges. Due to large number of tests and exercises that have to be marked, there is a tendency on the part of instructors to use test questions that are easier to mark. High level ability questions that involve critical thinking and problem solving skills can be used rarely*".

As indicated in the quality audit report and viewed by some faculty QA directors, lack of remedial instruction based on continuous assessment was one of the major problems in the university. This is mainly associated with lack of time arising from the large number of assessment and other duties that the instructors have to carry out. Based on continuous assessment, the development of a marking scheme and the marking appear to be the sole responsibility of the instructors. There is no anonymous marking (i.e. where the marker does not know the name of the student whose paper is being marked), so there is no robust, transparent system that ensures that students are assessed fairly and consistently and that the current practice is not open to abuse.

4.7.4.5. Research and publication

In HU, in order to implement the university's research strategy, there were different types of organizational units and teams. These were the office of the research and development directorate, research partnership and collaboration office, research institute/centres, College Research and Development Coordination Office and departmental research and development team. The office of the research and development directorate was accountable to the academic vice president's office and had a mandate of coordinating research,

allocating and facilitating research funding, and organizing university-wide research-related activities.

According to information provided by the research director, the university also has a research guide or manual in addition to the research strategy planned from 2010-2015, which serves as a guiding manual for every activity of research in the university. In its mission, HU aspires to being one of the best higher learning institutions in Africa and a centre of excellence in teaching and research. The

Research, Extension and Publication Committee (REPC) has a very important role to play if the university is to be regarded as a centre of excellence in research. There is no doubt that the university is engaged in research. This is focused strongly in the College of Agriculture.

The self-evaluation document (SED, 2008) and interview with the research and publication directorate indicate that most newly established faculties (Business and Economics, Law and Social Science and Technology) had limited research activities. The reason given was that most new faculties had young and new staff members who needed advanced training and encouragement from older constituents of HU and the leadership. Over all, the proportion of staff involved in research was less than 50%, despite the fact that the senate legislation of the university states that the teaching staff members of the university are expected to engage in research activities. In order not to take too big a share of a teaching time, a staff member is not expected to be engaged work for more than 30% of the workload. However, this expectation is not being met. The idea was viewed by the university's research and publication directorate (KI) as follows:

> *Five years ago, Faculty of Engineering, Law and Business and Economics had young staff; their capacity to involve in research was very low. Hence, the university planned to provide training to this young and other staff on how to write scientific research, how to write research proposals. As a result of this training the participation of academic staff in research increased from time to time (for example, in 2002, 42 and in 2004, 107 research projects were funded by the university from regular budget).*

The KI explained that HU encourages research in all disciplines. However, because of limited financial resources and the need for problem-solving research, the university targeted selective investment in key, cluster strategic research areas. To achieve research excellence, the university revised its research priorities and its thematic areas every five years like national and regional needs and priorities (HU Research Strategy, 2010: 5). The university has links and research collaboration in Ethiopia and other countries. This collaboration provides funding, training, and technical and managerial support. The Dean of the College for Natural Science explained the issue as follows: "*We have international links and joint projects with NORD (Swedish and Norwegian Agency), NUFU (Norwegian Centre for Higher Education), Oklahoma University, and universities in Holland, New Zealand and the USA. Now about 27 PhD and 105 master's students are funded by these organizations and universities*". Nationally, the university collaborates with local institutions such as *The Southern Agricultural Research Institute, the Education Bureau of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR*). About incentives, the SED indicated that the undertaking of research is rated as equivalent to three credit hours of teaching. Thus, a member of staff with a research project and normal teaching load could receive payment for teaching overload. All research activity is aggregated and counts for only three credit hours.

According to the faculty deans, the university has developed an incentive mechanism that encourages academic staff towards research. The University also presents international conferences and symposiums, and scientific forums. For example, in 2010 an international conference was held in Hawassa HAIC sponsored by Hawassa University. But, these international research conferences were limited. The university management presented evidence of very few international conferences.

4.7.4.6. Commitment of top managers to QA

Effective implementation of QA systems requires significant changes in the collective mindset and work culture of the institution. Implementing QA in large institutions such as Hawassa University necessitated constant commitment, and strong perseverance to ensure it could have the greatest and most positive impact both internally and externally. This takes

highly visible and vocal leaders committed to providing and instilling quality assurance in all staff members.

The view of respondents on the commitment of the top management of the university was not clear. The university quality assurance office was already set up. For this QA office, a senior quality assurance director was assigned. The QA activities came under the overall direction and guidance of the director. In addition to this, at faculty level, faculty quality assurance coordinators were assigned and a quality assurance manual /guideline also recently prepared. However, what was put on paper was not translated into practice. Until the data gathered for this research project, an internal quality audit had not been conducted, except in 2007. In 2007, the internal quality audit was conducted based on the request of the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA). The current focus of the university management was on a modular approach to teaching and learning; on the preparation of module revisions and monitoring guidelines rather than checking of the quality of the institution. According to the view of one KI from the institutional QA office, module revision and monitoring guidelines are part of QA and enhancement. The reasons for less commitment of the university management were: lack of resources, overloaded QA managers, absence of incentives and large class sizes.

In conclusion, respondents were generally agreed that no effective quality assurance system has been implemented at Hawassa University. There has been a great deal of “preparations” for an internal quality audit in the form of meetings and workshops. A manual for QA has been established; as well as QA committees at faculty/ college levels. As reflected in various responses, however, the implementation was still in its initial or planning phase. The implementation of quality assurance at Hawassa University was still in its infancy. There was no real implementation of a QA system in the university. Interviewed respondents expressed their concern about the lack of resources (human or quality experts) for implementing effective QA mechanisms.

4.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the analysis of data gathered through questionnaires and themes identified from the four case studies. It consists of five parts, namely the analysis of data from questionnaires, and the analysis of themes for the case studies of St Mary’s and Admas

Private University Colleges and Jimma and Hawassa public universities. The current QA practices of all case studies were analyzed in relation to national QA guideline or HERQA's ten focus areas, using documentary evidence and interview data. St Mary's and Admas University Colleges are the first higher education institutions to conduct institutional quality audits in the country, pioneers of QA for HEI in Ethiopia. They have achieved this through the development of several initiatives. Both private HEIs had comprehensive QA systems as compared to the two public HEIs. Even though similar themes emerged and the same quality methodologies were used, the public and private case studies had different practices.

The next chapter will present the discussion of common themes identified from all the case

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS FOR FINAL THEMES

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four presented data gathered through document review and interviews for each case study individually and survey results for all case study institutions together. This chapter discusses the main findings presented in the previous chapter. The discussion is based on a set of analytic categories newly derived from a re-categorization of the themes from all the case studies. The analytic categories are discussed with reference to relevant literature, and where appropriate, references are made to the corresponding thematic analysis.

In this chapter, the data drawn from documents, interview data from key informants (KIs) and survey questionnaires is reported principally from combined data, which was derived from three major categories of EQA experts, namely academic managers and senior instructors involved in the implementation of quality assurance systems in their respective institutions and organizations. The identification of themes from each of the three sources of evidence rendered several key themes. The product of combining themes of the three sources of evidence from national and institutional levels is presented in detail.

The practices of external and internal quality assurance systems in the context of Ethiopian public and private higher education institutions and the national QA agency (HERQA) were captured in the responses given by each category of participants. Additionally, data on major factors that have been influencing the effective implementation of QA systems at national and institutional levels and major activities of internal QA systems were also obtained through interviews and questionnaires. After the collection of the initially identified themes, there followed clustering and renaming of themes and organization of the themes into categories with similar meaning (Chimwayange, 2005: 123) .Forty-five themes were first categorized under the two main dimensions of external and internal QA systems. This

process resulted in the identification of four themes related to external QA systems and eight internal QA themes

5.1.1. COMMON THEMES FROM FOUR CASE STUDIES AND THE NATIONAL QA AGENCY

Following Patton (1990), I was able to undertake another thematic reorganization of the themes raised by respondents of the four case studies and national QA agency (HERQA). This was possible through closer meaning analysis and working back and forth between the data and classification system to verify meaningfulness (Patton, 1990: 403). Through this process of analysis, it was possible to discover and identify more meaningful information from the data, grouping together those categories that had converging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 217). Further categorizations of the themes were analyzed under two contexts, external quality assurance and internal QA practices. The new groupings were classified as (1) external QA, (2) and internal QA processes. Under internal quality assurance systems the new groupings were (1) trends in internal quality assurance, (2) major activities of internal QA systems, and (3) factors that influence the effective implementation of QA systems and so on. Once the themes were clustered and finalized, the results of the case studies were presented according to these dimensions and categories in the following three sections: (1) external QA, (2) internal QA, and (3) factors influencing the effective implementation of QA systems. The results presented in the majority of cases were supported by direct quotes from KI interviews.

5.2. EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIMENSION

The first set of analytic categories derived from the themes related to external QA. It is generally accepted that a quality assurance system in higher education entails both external and internal QA processes. External QA refers to processes outside HEIs to assure all stakeholders of the quality of the institution's graduates. Within the scope of this thesis, EQA has a process external to the HEIs and located within the national state. This section discusses the following four major analytic categories pertaining to the external dimension of QA in higher education.

External quality assurance system

The role and impact of national QA system

Accreditation of private HEIs and its impact

Problems related to EQA system

5.2.1. External QA system

The way that the concept of quality assurance has been introduced and developed in Ethiopia has been strongly influenced by various “travelling salesmen” who drew on their own (northern) university sector experience and conceptual frameworks to advise the sector and government. The main sources of northern influence were the World Bank, which was offering advice and low-cost funding; the UK, through Voluntary Service Overseas, who placed experienced UK academics in senior positions in the newly created HERQA and the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC), and the Dutch through the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) projects that were mainly run through the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, to develop pedagogy and strategic capability within HERQA. Quality assurance as a travelling concept has proved to be “leaky” and malleable as it has moved to Ethiopia *(*Ashcroft & Rayner, 2011: 12*).*

As indicated in institutional and national self-evaluation reports, the idea of a quality assurance system emerged in the country because of the rapid growth of private and public higher education institutions, accompanied by rapid growth in student enrolment in HEIs, demands for greater relevance in the university curriculum, and calls for higher quality from employers and the universities. Consequently, the higher education community, government and other stakeholders sought new mechanisms to improve quality to stem the decline in the quality of higher education. One key informant (KI) from the national QA agency (HERQA) further explained the introduction of QA systems as follows:

> *At the beginning the concept of quality and QA system was introduced to Ethiopia from the North (British consultants who came to Ethiopia for consultancy services), from South Africa, Ireland and Volunteer Service Organization (VSO). It was because of the influences of outsiders and globalization. At the beginning when we establish the national QA agency (HERQA) we had external consultants from outsiders especially from VSO group. We benefited a lot from their experience. They also provided us trainings for internal and external Quality reviewers.*

As a result of this fact, the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) were established by the federal government of Ethiopia through higher education proclamation 351/2003 as one of the key agencies responsible for guiding and regulating the higher education sector. The national need for QA was initially generated through the Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO). According to another KI from the national QA agency, "*the need was initially identified as being due to the growth of the post-secondary sector and an increase in the number of private providers. Perhaps from the influences of outsiders, it was not locally driven*". Some attribute the introduction of QA in Ethiopia to the awareness and the desire for quality higher education. HEIs increased: public universities from two universities reached nine in 2003 /1995 and 31 in 2012 and the curriculum of higher education institutions did not satisfy the needs of society. So, in order to meet these needs, the universities had to establish comprehensive quality assurance systems that could ensure the quality of education at national and institutional levels. At the beginning, the concept of a QA system was introduced to Ethiopia from the north (British consultants who came to Ethiopia for consultancy services); the experiences of South Africa and Ireland were also studied by teams of experts from Ethiopia.

5.2.2. The role of the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA)

One of key activities of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) is the institutional quality auditing of higher education institutions (HEIs). An institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and of the teaching and learning environment (HERQA 2003, 2006, 2009). QA agencies generally consult the respective institutions during various stages of the external QA process to uphold the spirit of partnership and mutual trust in the QA exercise. Institutions are consulted in the development of the QA practices and other issues of quality assurance. As an external quality audit body in Ethiopia, HERQA has been involved in assuring quality in higher education institutions since its establishment in 2003. HERQA is currently collaborating with major stakeholders in developing a robust quality assurance system at national and institutional levels. Previously, there were no independent non-governmental QA agencies engaged in quality auditing at national and local levels. HERQA was the only governmental quality assurance agency that had a mandate to conduct quality audits of private and public higher education institutions and accredited private higher education institutions.

According to HERQA and Abebe Dinku (2008), in the Ethiopian context quality in higher education means “fitness for purpose”. Quality is judged by assessing to what extent intended outcomes are being achieved. When funding higher education, government is concerned about “value for money” and “fitness for purpose”. Employers also expect a higher education system that offers “fitness for purpose”, in other words a system that produces graduates who meet the needs of the country’s industries and services. Graduates should not only match the vacancies that business and organizations wish to fill but also have the necessary skills that will enable them to work effectively. HEIs are responsible for assuring the quality of their own educational programs. Quality in Higher Education comprises input, process and outcomes (graduate employability, achievements and research results). HERQA’s vision sets out how the agency would like to be seen in five or ten year’s time. Its vision is to be a nationally recognized centre of excellence in the safeguarding, accreditation and enhancement of standards and quality in higher education.

The quality audit of HERQA focuses on the evaluation of the quality of education institutions as a whole, assessing what mechanisms for quality assurance are in place, and whether the achievement levels of the graduating students match the degree concerned. The key purposes of an audit visit are to validate the self-evaluation document submitted by the HEI; for example, from 2006-2008 HERQA conducted 18 external quality audits in 11 public and 7 private HEI. According to one KI from the national QA agency, HERQA also conducted quality audits in 9 public and 16 private HEIs from 22 public and 66 private HEIs from 2008-2011. HERQA intends that through its institutional quality audit reports and dissemination of good practice it will help to enhance the provision of higher education in Ethiopia and the confidence of all stakeholders in the quality and relevance of that provision (HERQA, 2006, 2009, 2008 and 2011). HERQA has a legal mandate to assess institutions and /or programs, approve new programs in private HEIs, and approve or (deny) the creation of new private HEIs. The agency sets minimum standards for institutions / programs to monitor the performance of institutions and has the power to approve or deny permission to private institutions to operate. HERQA has prepared subject benchmarks for ten subjects and also worked to prepare benchmarks for other subjects (HERQA, 2006, 2009 and 2011).

A point of contention noted during the interview with national QA experts, institutional QA directors and college deans, was the issue of the autonomy, unclear role of and capacity of HERQA. Whether or not HEQA is an independent EQA agency with clear decision-making power was actively debated during the data collection of this research. One KI from JU stated that:

> *HERQA as a national QA agency has no power to make decisions and take measures on low performing public HEIs. Its power has been only conducting quality audit of HEIs and recommend things to be done regarding quality to HEIs and Ministry of Education. I have a reservation on the confidence and independence of HEQA in taking action without the influence of Ministry of Education or the state.*

There were also interview participants from case study institutions who explained the weakness of HERQA. In their view, HERQA had no national QA policy and QA framework (quality assurance model); the national QA system did not bring about standardization of courses, while standardizing the level of the courses that HEIs provided was a major problem. Another KI stated that:

> *HERQA expected to establish a national QA policy which would guide the QA policy and system of HEIs. The national QA system also expected to standardize courses given at national level, national QA definitely gives national recognition. I also think that, in the long term, it will have benefit beyond what we didn't get right now, because it takes time to build credibility. We never complain the national QA agency at this early stage of development.*

A KI from St Mary's University College viewed the role of HERQA concerning professional support to HEIs as follows:

> *HERQA's professional support is not adequate. They sometimes provide trainings for our quality reviewers based on our request, distribute different publications especially institutional Quality Audit reports, and provide accreditation. The commitment of HERQA in disseminating best international and national practices to higher education institutions and comparing higher*

education institutions by preparing common benchmarks was not encouraging. HERQA focuses on accreditation than professional support. So, much is expected from HERQA in providing professional support for higher education.

In general, the introduction of an external QA regime in Ethiopia generated internal QA mechanisms within higher education institutions. The concept of quality and quality assurance has been embedded as a culture in both the national QA agency and some private and public HEIs, and QA systems have been established in the majority of HEIs. QA offices have been opened and QA directors assigned for institutional QA. QA committees and coordinators have also been assigned at faculty level for their quality. These were opportunities created for HEIs by the national QA agency. It created further opportunities to gain a greater control for QA within private HEIs. However, it follows from the above data that much will be expected from HERQA, in particular in building its human capacity to provide adequate professional support for HEIs.

5.2.3. Accreditation and its impact

The term accreditation refers to an evaluation by an authorized body (National Quality Assurance Agency) of whether an institution or an educational program qualifies for a certain status. This status may have implications for the institution itself (e.g. permission to operate) and / or the qualifications of its students and graduates for employment (Brennan and Shah, 2000a: 32). The accreditation decision is frequently based on the results of an evaluation process.

As indicated in national and institutional documents, pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation of private higher education institutions and some other non-governmental institutions are primarily the activities of HERA. To facilitate the work of external assessors and help the private higher education institution to recognize the standards and minimum requirements by which they will be assessed, guidelines, checklists and procedures for pre-accreditation and accreditation have been developed with the participation of the stakeholders and on the basis of the higher education proclamation. The actual accreditation process works only for private HEIs, not for public universities. In addition to meeting the course approval and providers' accreditation requirements for individual courses, private

tertiary education providers are required to demonstrate ongoing compliance with overarching quality standards relating to all aspects of the development, delivery and assessment of education and training. I asked a KI from one private university college why accreditation of institutions / programs was limited to private HEIs. “What is the impact of this accreditation process in promoting the performance of your university college?” The KI stated that:

> *HERQA has been conducting quarterly visit in private HEIs and accredit their programs .HERQA always Consider all private HEIs as fraudulent; the agency has doubt on the Performance of private HEIs. So, all private HEIs programs should pass through the national accreditation process. Public HEIs to be accredited by the government by reason of being government sponsored. The policy makers also doubtful of the quality of graduates from private HEIs . This is wrong perception, all private HEIs are not fraudulent, it is the weakness of the national QA agency to identify them and take corrective measures. Even though, public universities enrol the high scorers and private HEIs take low scorers in 12th grade national examination, yet we are producing better graduates than public HEIs.*

According to this KI, public HEIs should not be exempted from the accreditation process. All tertiary institutions, both public and private, should be subjected to accreditation. The government needs to develop a “*comprehensive and standardized accreditation system that covers all public and private HEIs*”, because the quality of education in public higher education institutions has been deteriorating as a result of increasing numbers of HEIs and students and the absence of an accreditation system.

Pertaining to the impact of accreditation, the view of KIs from private university colleges can be summarized as follows: the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) in conjunction with MOE has the power to close down private HEIs that fail to achieve accreditation, and publicize the outcomes of accreditation. The agency publishes a list of accredited and non-accredited institutions based on their performance. The publications of the names of accredited institutions and the denial of accreditation have both a powerful positive and negative impact on stakeholders and private HEIs. Those institutions that are accredited gain

an important kind of recognition nationally and internationally for having achieved standards of quality and demonstrating a commitment to continue quality improvement. Having a license to continue will boost the morale of accredited private HEIs and also make them better able to respond to business needs and public demands. Therefore, they are always ready to safeguard the quality of education through their internal quality audit. Otherwise, they will be out of the game.

Accreditation also needs self-assessment and timely follow-up by HERQA. The process of preparing for self- assessment and timely follow-up also encourage institutions to improve their quality to meet the expected national standards. Therefore, the accreditation process has an impact on the performance of private higher education institutions. As indicated in national QA documents, accreditation is not mandatory for the public colleges and universities because they have been established under their respective act of parliament, giving them autonomy in governance and quality assurance. There is no obligatory program and institutional accreditation in public universities. Private universities, on the other hand, are required to submit to an accreditation process and licensing (HERQA 2006 & 2009: 45). Another KI from a private university college commented that:

> *Accreditation is mandatory for private higher education; private university colleges and their programs must be approved by HERQA. The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency is the sole accrediting and quality assurance body and is concerned with accrediting private higher education institutions. That is wrong, accreditation is very important in improving our performance, all HEIs in the country should be treated equally no need of isolating us.*

Therefore, private higher education institutions have benefited from accreditation and the accreditation process. However, accreditation has had a negative effect on those who have failed to meet the requirements of accreditation and been denied a license to operate.

5.2.4. Problems related to the EQA system

Staff members of the national QA agency are involved in the development of the quality assurance framework, taking responsibility for monitoring the major phases of quality

assurance, training QA reviewers, and orienting the institutions for institutional preparations. In some agencies they remain as coordinators to facilitate these stages and in a few other systems, they are more extensively involved. The option depends on the size of the national system of higher education, the size of the quality assurance agency, the amount of quality assurance work to be done and, consequently, whether it is possible for the agency to send a staff member for each of the review teams. The extent of participation also depends on the interpretation of “objectivity” of the QA process.

With regard to improvement, HERQA includes in its EQA reports advice to HEIs on required, recommended and suggested improvements. On follow-up activities and/or subsequent EQAs, HERQA will seek evidence of implementation of improvements. EQA reports will also highlight good practice. HERQA plans to disseminate good practice through its workshops and conferences and via publications. HERQA will strive to share good practice and to recommend and encourage improvements.

To understand the practices of the national QA agency and institutional quality assurance, I analyzed quality assurance documents, manuals and guidelines laid down by universities and the National Quality Assurance Agency. I also interacted with the managements of the universities and university colleges and experts of the National Quality Assurance Agency in formal interviews on their practices and procedures in quality assuring their work. From these interactions and document analysis, I understood that there was no quality assurance policy at national and institutional levels. The national QA agency had no policy that could serve as a framework for institutional QA policy and QA systems. There was no national quality framework (QA model) used by the national QA agency and higher education institutions. One KI from the national QA agency noted that at national level there was no quality assurance policy to serve as a framework for higher education institutions; however , there was a national quality assurance standard (HERQA’s ten focus areas). HEIs also used these HERQA focus areas as a framework. Yet there is a plan to develop a national QA policy in conjunction with HEIs.

In the view of respondents, HERQA has no human capacity to conduct external quality audits and provide timely support according to its plan (once within five years). It selects external

quality auditors from other higher education institutions. The KI further explained the issue as indicated below:

> *The selection of external Quality Auditors has been from both private and public HEIs Instructors or professionals. They are selected based on their academic rank and academic qualification and interests of the professionals to work in the area. What we did is, first we select instructors from different universities, we provide them training on how to conduct external audit in HEIs and then we release them for the audit. But most of the time we can't get adequate and qualified professionals in the area for all private and public higher education institutions. Therefore, the government need to solve the problem.*

Another issue raised by both public and private HEIs was the problem of experience sharing and disseminating the outcomes of quality audits. HERQA did not facilitate experience sharing among HEIs at national level but what HERQA did was sometimes to arrange/ organize annual workshops for all HEIs through which they could exchange their experience. The dissemination of international and national best practice to HEIs by the National Quality Assurance Agency had not yet started. A KI from the national QA agency said that the agency was planning to work on it for the next five years. Comparing HEIs by preparing common benchmarks and rewarding the best performer was also impossible because of two major reasons, namely (1) the objective of national QA system is not to compare HEIs at this early stage, but to establish a strong QA system at national and institutional levels; (2) it is impossible to compare public HEIs and Private HEIs because private HEIs have been working hard to get accreditation whereas public HEIs are accredited by law, and hence they are not equally concerned about QA system in their institutions.

The issue of salary within the national QA agency was a matter commented on by many respondents from HERQA experts. According to them, the current structure was unsuitable for professional staff involved in EQ audit, where the type of responsibilities was thought to be "much more difficult for the work done at this level". The agency was unable to recruit highly qualified staff who could serve as national quality experts and reviewers. According to one KI, the positions were "not attractive enough" to professionals already employed in higher education institutions. It is difficult to retain and attract qualified staff through such

inadequate remuneration, whereas the existing staffs were also unable to give total commitment and concentration to the work. According to the view of national QA experts, the salary of NQA experts was lower than that of HEI instructors/professors. The ability to retain staff and attract qualified QA experts was seriously compromised by the inadequate remuneration. The main reason for the NQAA's inability to recruit highly qualified staff was the low salary for the vacant position in the agency. This suggests that the position was unfavourable for professional staff involved in HEI. Unless the government improved the salary of professionals working in the agency, (1) it would be impossible to attract qualified professionals to the National Quality Assurance Agency, and (2) the existing staff would leave the agency and join other organizations.

5.3. THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE DIMENSION

This section focuses on QA at the level of institutional practice. It is true that HEIs do not depend exclusively on external (national) quality mechanisms. A number of internal QA practices are also at work within HEIs. This section addresses major themes emerging from the case studies; it is presented through the analysis of subsequent issues of QA practices in Ethiopia. This part responds to the main research question, namely *What is the nature of internal quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions?* The results are presented through a thematic analysis of the data obtained from those who were more directly involved at the level of practice. Hence, data for this section comes primarily from institutional QA managers' interviews and questionnaires and documents from senior academics and heads of department. This section focuses on the following eight analytic categories pertaining to the internal dimension of QA in higher education institutions.

Trends in internal quality assurance
Development, approval and revision of courses
Quality assuring teaching and learning
Quality assuring student's assessment process
Research and publication
Tracer study
Commitment of top managers to QA
Impact of internal QA systems on quality

5.3.1. Trends in internal QA systems

In terms of how the institutional QA system was introduced, most of the interviewed respondents from public universities based their model on the requirements of the government's national QA agency, while other respondents from private university colleges said that the institutional leadership decided on the model and provided instruction, training and support to the unit to implement it. QA systems were introduced in Ethiopian higher education institutions at different times and varied from institution to institution. For example, in St Mary's University College it was introduced in September 2004 with the help of the VSO higher education management advisory working group. In JU, a QA system was established for the first time after a national draft of quality assurance policy was prepared in July 2005 in one of the EQUIP-HERQA joint workshops organized in Addis Ababa where coordinators and vice coordinators of ADRC from the nine public universities and HERQA experts actively participated in the process. After that, the university quality assurance system was established in Jimma University. In Admas University College it was introduced after 1996 EC (2004) through the efforts of the top management of the university, and in Hawassa University it was introduced after 2005 similar to that of Jimma University.

Quality assurance activities involving the development of explicit quality assurance policies and manuals, the establishment of quality assurance structures (in the form of quality assurance offices or units and personnel) and the regular evaluation of institutional performance are common features of higher education systems in most parts of the world. These developments are taking place at institutional as well as at national level. In most Ethiopian public and private higher education institutions, internal quality assurance systems, quality structures and quality manuals have been established. A sample view is presented from a private university college as follows:

> *I can say now, we have, I think, an exemplary quality assurance practice and Quality assurance office. The Quality Assurance department is led by an assistant professor who is accountable directly to the President's office which might make us different from other higher educational institutions in Ethiopia. Because many of the quality assurance offices, departments, or what so ever*

are directed by the Academic Vice president. The fact why we made this office be accountable to the president is because
the administration and other wings have also to give meticulous consideration to quality and this office is made to be independent of other wings so as to play strong role to the extent of monitoring and maintaining quality even on what is being done by the president, and if possible beyond the level of the president's office. In other words, it was made to have freedom and autonomy to exercise well practices over the overall activities of the university college.

The information gathered through the survey and as indicated in figure 5.2. majority (60%) and (58%) of respondents from public institutions indicated that QA systems were introduced in their HEIs between 2001 and 2002 EC; still a significant number of respondents (41% and 38%) from public institutions reported that QA systems were introduced between 2003 and 2004 EC. On the other hand, 45% and 40% of respondents from private HEIs reported that they introduced QA systems between 1999 and 2000 EC an insignificant number of respondents (10% and 5%) indicated that they introduced QA system between 2001 and 2002 EC.

The time of the introduction of QA systems differed from institution to institution. The majority of the respondents indicated that QA systems were introduced to private university colleges between 1999 and 2000 EC and in public universities from 2001 and 2002 EC. Even though the data gathered through interviews, institutional documents and surveys indicates different years for the introduction of QA systems, I can infer that QA systems started first in private higher education institutions after 2004 and in public universities after 2005. This fact shows that public universities did not follow the formal rule set by the government that had demanded quality assurance system when they were needed.

Developing QA a manual or quality guidelines is another important issue in internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. The development of an institutional quality manual is a major step in the overall process of quality management implementation. In fact, it was an expectation of the government that quality assurance manuals would be prepared in all HEIs, based on national QA standards; however, only in private HEIs were QA manuals well developed and functional.

In addition to document analysis and interviews, data was gathered in this study through survey questionnaires regarding the development of QA manuals and the year in which this was done. I thus asked respondents to indicate whether they had developed a quality manual at all and if so, in which year. As shown in Figure 5.1, 80% of the respondents from public HEIs reported that they had developed their QA manual in 2004 EC at the time when the survey was undertaken, 40% indicated that they developed their manual between the 2002 and 2003 EC academic years, while an insignificant number of respondents – 10% (9) – indicated that their institution developed a QA manual between 2000 and 2001 EC. The majority of the respondents from public universities confirmed that they had developed the quality manual in 2004 EC at the time when the survey was undertaken, and the majority of respondents from private university colleges (90%) indicated that their institutions had developed the manual between 2002 and 2003 EC. From the data gathered qualitatively and quantitatively, we can infer that the case study higher education institutions established their own quality manuals from 2009 to 2012. Private university colleges established QA manuals first and public universities developed theirs later on. This also suggests that private higher education responded to government demands faster than public higher education institutions. Consequently, the findings so far suggest that private university colleges implemented different parts of their quality management systems more comprehensively than public universities.

As indicated in the internal quality audit report, quality is well embedded in both the vision and mission of private higher education institutions. The private university colleges, in their five-year strategic plans, have also clearly indicated the provision of best quality and relevant education and training as one of their main strategic goals. In addition, they have set out both directions and implementation schedules for the achievement of this strategic goal. The QA office director of Admas University College pointed out that:

> *Quality Assurance system emerged in our university college before 2003 (before the establishment of HERQA in 2003). In 1996 EC quality Assurance department was established at UC because of two reasons, (1) as private HEI, we know that the existence or sustainability of our UC is based on the quality of education we provide to society. It*

is a matter of survival; it is market-based education system; (2) to maintain the national and international standards to enhance the quality of our education. Thus, we included quality issue in our vision and mission.

Private HEI case study institutions such as St Mary's and Admas University Colleges have developed a robust quality assurance system and quality manuals that are based on HERQA's ten focus areas. The self-evaluation document confirmed that the manual was intended to guide the action of the management and the whole UC community towards the achievement of excellence in education. However, in public higher education case studies, comprehensive quality assurance systems still had not been established, QA manuals /guidelines had only been developed recently, and their QA systems were not functional; merely symbolic. They had established their own quality assurance systems, they had quality assurance structures, and directors for QA had been assigned at institutional level, but assuring the quality of their education was purely symbolic. The thoughts of one KI from public universities were captured as follows:

Our institution didn't conduct internal quality audit from 2007 until yet [now], internal quality audit is based on the interest of the top management and the pressure from the top, it needs follow-ups from the state. Now there is no follow-up on the part of HERQA, the top management of the university needs pressure from the top. If the MOE gives due emphasis to quality issue at different national conferences and meetings, the top management of the university make quality their top agenda or priority, otherwise they forget the quality issue. Therefore, there should be follow-up mechanism on the part of MOE and HERQA.

The interview with the university and university college quality assurance directors and college deans and quality documents of these institutions indicated that QA systems had been established at faculty level in the form of QA committees. With the exception of Jimma University, the QA committees were structured in a similar way in both public and private higher education institutions. Chaired by faculty deans, they comprised faculty deans, assistant faculty deans, department heads, and staff representatives. In private university colleges, at faculty level, the quality enhancement committee had

10-12 members, with one student representative from each department. For example, in St Mary's University College the 12 members were classified into three task forces, each with three major sections. The teams used questionnaires, interviews, and documents to gather information from students, instructors and department heads. The Faculty Quality Assessment Unit (FQAU) supervised quality operations at faculty and department levels. FQAU was chaired by the faculty or college deans or their nominees, and membership consisted of the relevant subject / program team leaders or department heads. FQAU met regularly to approve assessment results and to review the operation of the program. The frequency of the meetings was determined by the committee. In both St Mary's and Admas University Colleges the administrative QA unit (AQAU) was obliged to audit the service and support systems of the institutions to assure their function of support to the university college mission. The head of department chaired the Department Quality Assessment Team (DQAT) and administered the assessment activity at the department level in collaboration with the staff of the institutional quality office. The team was composed of members of the department. And finally, the quality assurance unit for offices under the academic vice president were responsible to assess the services offered by such offices as the registrar, library, program office and student affairs office, practicum and apprenticeship office or any other office.

In JU, one of the public universities, the development of institutional self-evaluation began in February, 2007 with the establishment of a self evaluation team, recruited and headed by the office of the academic and research vice president. The team was composed of ten members and the selection of individuals was done based on the criteria set according to Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) documents in consultation with the Academic Development and Resource Center [ADRC] staff of the university. Senior academic staff from different faculties, the student support service and the student body and coordinator of ADR participated in the institutional quality audit.

As reported by the university QA office director, JU had its own QA system led by the academic program officer; there was no separate QA office or position at institutional level, which was different from the other three case studies. It was combined with the Academic Program Office (APO). Unlike the other three case studies, at JU the Academic Remedial

Action Office was responsible for assuring the quality of education at the faculty level. Although there was an established QA system in the university, there was no evidence to indicate the presence of a QA policy. A sample view from the college Remedial Action Office is presented below:

> *I am recently assigned as a head of natural science Faculty Academic remedial office. I have no training and experience in this area. There was no clear guideline that clearly indicates the procedure of self- assessment or how to conduct program evaluation. The role of Faculty Academic Remedial office was academic remediation, the Academic Remedial Action focuses on Academic Remedial Actions for undergraduate Students: Students who score less than 55% of the series continuous assessment administered for a course, affirmative action, arranging tutorial programs for female students. This Academic Remedial Action is based on department/School special recommendations.*

In JU therefore, the college/ faculty QA office focused on academic remedial action instead of on internal quality audit at faculty level. There was no evidence to indicate internal quality assessment at faculty/ college level by the committee or the office established for this purpose.

In private institutions participating in the case study, the QA committee began its operation after meetings with the university presidents. In the meetings, quality enhancement committees of different units agreed to conduct quality assessment. To ensure common understanding between quality enhancement committees of different units, the quality assurance manual was distributed to each committee member. Based on this decision, the faculty organized and carried out self-assessment at program level and produced a report. Finally, they submitted the final draft of the self-assessment report to the university QA office (SMUC, 2009). According to the view of one KI, a faculty dean of SMUC,

Following the institutional quality audit visit, the self-assessment report was presented to the institutional quality audit task force. After thoroughly discussing the matter, the final self-assessment report was sent to the national QA agency (HERQA).

As indicated in SED and the interviews with QA directors and faculty deans, in all the case study higher education institutions the quality assurance process covered the teaching-learning, curriculum design and revision, research and publication, as well as students' performance assessment. In addition, data collected through the survey also indicated that the internal quality assurance process included teaching and learning activities, student support, research and publication, curriculum design and revision, and student assessment. As shown in figure 5.3, 85% of the respondents to our survey answered that their QA process covered teaching and learning, while curriculum design and revision, which is closely related to teaching and learning, is covered 79%. The other activities mentioned by 69%, 58.5% and 51% of respondents were students' performance assessment, research and publication activities and student support respectively.

As indicated above, the main focus of the institutions' QA activities were teaching and learning activities; the second important activity being curriculum development and revision, the third and fourth student assessment and student support systems. The evidence from interviews, documentary analysis and surveys demonstrated that almost all higher education institutions, both private and public, paid the closest attention to teaching and learning, curriculum development and student assessment in assuring internal quality when compared to other activities of the university.

In general, all case study institutions had established their own QA systems and had QA structures at institutional and faculty levels. These QA systems were comprehensive and functional in private university colleges. Private university colleges had been conducting well-timed quality reviews, whereas in public universities the QA mechanisms were neither functional nor adequate. The adequacy of quality mechanisms is connected to neo-institutional theory, namely to the question whether this system works symbolically or genuinely. The neo-institutional approach highlights that a higher education institution may be able to satisfy governmental demands by symbolically but not genuinely implementing QA mechanisms. The announced implementation might therefore engender a favourable governmental reaction regardless of whether the mechanisms are actually implemented. Public universities had established their own QA systems, they had QA structures at institutional and faculty levels, they had QA manuals on paper, but in a symbolic way, while

not implementing the system in practice. The evidence of this study supports the view that symbolic compliance, while internally resisting change, is sustainable for public HEIs with governmental policy. There is a significant gap between private and public higher education institutions in implementing internal QA system.

5.3.2. Development, approval and revision of courses

One of the most crucial elements determining the quality of student learning is the quality of the academic programs or courses of study that students go through. The initiation of a new program can start anywhere (from students, stakeholders, departmental council, academic commission or the government). The curriculum design (redesign) is done in a structured way, involving all stakeholders, there is a well functioning curriculum committee, the curriculum is regularly evaluated, revision of the curriculum takes place at a reasonable time period and quality assurance of the curriculum is adequate (DAAD, 2010: 29).

The vice presidents, faculty deans, and QA directors in the case study institutions stated that the process of course approval involved academic committee structures that operated at different levels within the higher education institutions. In all case study institutions, clear procedures and guidelines were followed in the approval of newly developed courses. According to them, new courses go through various committee structures before they can be approved. Course proposals in all case studies started at the department or academic unit level proceeded through the faculty council and went to the senate for approval.

Interview respondents from private university colleges stated that in their institutions, open hearings organized by the senate academic standard and curriculum committee might be required to precede faculty council action on provisional and permanent approval of programs or courses. Following approval, ongoing course performance was monitored and evaluated against both internal performance indicators and external measures of student satisfaction and professional requirements through course quality assurance processes. The data gathered through questionnaires from senior academic staff, department heads and faculty QA directors regarding curriculum design confirmed that, generally, curriculum proposals were considered by a committee established by a faculty or proposed by a department whose objectives and expected learning outcomes were necessarily led at faculty or department level, and ideally had to correspond with the strategy of the institution

as defined by the HEI leadership. Each institution had a working committee established by the institution at program and faculty levels to propose the curriculum. In addition to this, the curriculum of their institution had been designed by the ministry of education particularly for law, health and technology courses. The relevant committees and processes highlighted above are captured by the following interview responses of top management of St Mary's UC:

> *Proposal for a new courses go through quite rigorous processes. Department/ academic unit come up with the new course. They are discussed at department and faculty levels before they go to faculty curriculum committee. After the courses are approved by academic council, the faculty sends the proposal to academic standard and curriculum committee and finally approved by the university senate. So there is clearly defined process and procedures for curriculum development and approval.*

In addition to the above-mentioned processes, external stakeholders such as experts from other universities and organizations participated and played an important role in quality assuring course/ program development, particularly in St Mary's and Admas Private University Colleges. For example, quality assuring academic programs at SMUC had both an internal dimension, which involved committees assessing programs / courses before they were implemented, and an external dimension, where HERQA accredited the same programs with the participation of other external stakeholders.

In the case of private university colleges, the departmental committee considers new programs and may suggest a workshop. It then passes its recommendation to the departmental council, which in turn passes its recommendation through the department head to the academic commission. After discussion of a proposal, the academic commission may approve a workshop in which both internal (instructors, students, academic leaders) and external stakeholders (professional experts) participate in assessing the proposed program. Thereafter, the program may be revised and finally submitted to the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committees (ASCRC) of the senate. Such workshops were unknown in public universities.

In some cases, in particular in public universities, the curricula may be adopted from sister institutions and adjusted to the university's philosophy. In reality, curriculum development in public HEIs was not needs-based; public higher education institutions prepared their own curriculum based on the needs of the government, whereas private HEIs curriculum was demand-driven or market based, because private HEIs were focused on the demands of society. There are also situations where the basic framework of the program is prepared centrally and the detail of the curriculum is worked out by the committee at institutions. The committee will examine the graduate profile, resources required, courses to be covered, course description, sequence and semester distribution of the courses, nature of the course – whether it is lecture, laboratory, field visits, etc. or a combination – course credit hours, duration of the training, entry and graduation requirements, methods of assessment and quality assurance methods, among other things (HU & JU Business Process Re-Engineering Report, 2011).

After the document has been developed, it is presented to the council for further professional comments. The document is then forwarded to the faculty/college academic commission, where a decision is made to hold an internal or national curriculum workshop. In both situations, experts in various disciplines and other stakeholders are involved to enrich the draft curriculum document. The final document is then forwarded to the academic vice president for endorsement. The involvement of external stakeholders in quality assuring program development is evidenced by the following interview response from one of the heads of faculty from a public university on the methods they use in quality assuring program development in the faculty:

> *In reality, a number of curricula have been developed with the creation of new course.*
>
> *Most of the curriculum are harmonized, copied or adopted from other universities who previously started the program, only names are modified and credit points are also adjusted. The content either received from internet or copied from already prepared materials. There is no standard at national and institution levels by which we can check the quality of the curriculum.*

Concerning the process of evaluating the existing curriculum, data was gathered for this project through a survey questionnaire. As indicated in figure 5.4, both public and private HEIs have put in place different processes to monitor the existing curricula. In public HEIs the curricula or programs were evaluated occasionally, based on the interest of the instructors, and the curriculum was evaluated informally by discussion between staff members and students. In private HEIs the curriculum/programs were evaluated as part of an external accreditation, while the curricula were sometimes evaluated after students completed one program and the curriculum was evaluated informally through discussion between staff members and students.

As indicated by the majority of respondents from private university colleges, in private UCs the existing curricula were evaluated by external assessors (by National QA agency). They also revised their existing curricula after the completion of one program (after graduation of one batch of students). Once a program was up and running, the frequency and means for monitoring it also varied from one institution to another. In addition, most institutions seemed to conduct a variety of processes in a variety of combinations, leading to the conclusion that there is no one typical process for monitoring.

The findings of this study suggest that there is a significant gap between public universities and private university colleges in updating their curricula. It seems that private HEIs regularly revise their curriculum because of the pressure imposed upon them by the National Quality Assurance Agency, whereas in public higher education institutions the revision of the curriculum depends on the situation of the department and the institution or the interest of the instructors.

According to the responses of QA directors and faculty deans from three case study institutions, wit the exception of St Mary's and Admas University College, they do not appear to have a system for regular curriculum monitoring and periodic evaluation and review against set criteria. One of the faculty deans from St Mary's University College reported that the usual practices to revise the existing curriculum were that the UC evaluates the existing curricula within a three-year interval so that there is significant improvement on each departmental curriculum. As one KI from public institutions elaborated, "*right now, there is no regular reporting to the UC from the faculty, as far as the quality issues are concerned.*

However, it does not mean that the curriculum is not being revised or not developed. It means that there is no formal and regular time for curriculum revision and reporting mechanism. I think that is a big challenge for us."

The structures for program approval at the University of Jimma bear a lot of resemblance to those at Hawassa University. These include department, faculty and then Senate curriculum and standard committees. The structure for program development and approval in St Mary's University College was similar with that of Admas University College, and the internal processes of curriculum or program approval were complemented by a very regular external peer review component. All interviewed members of quality management of the two university colleges indicated that any developed programs were subjected to external examination by the National Quality Assurance Agency. This external review process involved vetting of newly developed courses by carefully selected professors from outside institutions. Experienced professionals with expertise in the relevant areas were also invited as external examiners to critically examine the review process. University policy of all case studies reflects external examination of programs as an important component of quality assurance; however in practice, particularly in public HEIs, only internal structures and processes are used to approve new programs. Whereas the structures and internal processes for program approval at all case study institutions are similar, the rigour of the approval processes is definitely different. Internal program development and program review processes are heavily dependent on the professional and academic grounding of staff. The absence of external review is indeed a major setback in terms of quality assuring academic programs at JU and HU. Within the institutions, academic members of staff feel very strongly about their inability to draw on this important facility in order to enhance the quality of their work. The interview with a head of the faculties of business and economics in St Mary's University College and Admas University College indicated that the Academic Quality Management Policy places due emphasis on external examination and review of academic programs as an important aspect of quality assuring programs.

At Jimma University, structures for program approval include department, faculty and senate committees. At department level, academic courses are developed by individual academics/ groups of instructors. They are tabled before a departmental academic meeting for

discussion and improvement. The elements considered include the relevance of the proposed course, the appropriateness of the course objectives and content, the alignment of the new course with departmental and institutional plans, as well as the needs of the government. Once a program is up and running, the frequency and means for monitoring it also vary from one institution to another. In addition, most institutions seem to conduct a variety of processes in a variety of combinations, adding to the conclusion that there is no one typical process for monitoring the existing curricula. Two thirds of respondents answered that the evaluation of curriculum and programs is based on the interests of the instructors and part of an external accreditation process.

5.3.3. Quality assuring teaching and learning

Apart from quality assuring program development, the rigour of the teaching and learning practices of an institution determine quality of delivery. This is considered the cutting edge of an educational institution because that is what influences students' learning. Academic audits have placed attention to the enhancement of teaching and learning on institutional agendas. They have also helped to clarify responsibility for improving quality in teaching and learning at individual, academic unit, faculty and institutional level (Dill, 2000: 23).

Documents from all the case study institutions confirmed that all case study HEIs had useful teaching and learning delivery policies and guidelines. This addresses the role of the instructors, active learning methods, classroom management, effective teaching, and characteristics of good teaching, planning and teaching students with special needs. For example, in St Mary's Private University College, this policy and guideline has been communicated to most. Consideration has also been given to using the guideline as a basis for the development of a policy document that would determine how teaching and learning should be undertaken.

The studied institutions place a lot of emphasis on this aspect of university activities, with some stating quite explicitly in their mission statements their thrust on quality teaching. Part of the mission statement of Admas University College, for instance, states "… We provide high quality education; training and advisory services on a needs oriented basis. We guarantee the above by maintaining excellence in Teaching, Learning, Research and Service to the community". The practice of quality assuring teaching and learning is aptly captured in

the interview responses given by one of the college deans in Admas UC. In response to whether they had any measures in place to assure the quality of teaching in his college / department, the college dean responded as follows:

> *Yes we do, I will start with the teaching itself, we have a system in place, the system that we call peer review where lecturers are obliged to invite a colleagues to sit in their lectures and evaluate their teaching and provide a professional support. This report is very useful in terms of appraisals. Peer evaluation assist us determine whether one is doing the teaching properly. In addition to peer evaluation, we have got also student evaluation where we require a lecturer to have their course evaluated by students at the end of the semester.*

The most common approaches employed in quality assuring teaching and learning in the case study institutions entail monitoring and assessment of staff by department as well as student evaluation, implementing active learning teaching approaches, induction programs, student advice, providing tutorial classes and student assignments. Active learning teaching approaches are perceived by the case study institutions as mandatory. Their efforts to make teaching and learning active are mainly realized through employing of different active learning methods. For instance, Admas University College was working hard to realize its students' active learning in all possible ways.

He further elaborated that "right from the very beginning Admas University College curriculum for each program is designed in the way it encompasses different active learning methods which could be employed for each course". The practical utilization of the active learning methods specified in each course outlined is evaluated by the staff in the departmental council's meetings and by students in the monthly joint meetings of campus deans and student representatives.

Although the learner-centred approach is the philosophy of Hawassa and Jimma Universities, every instructor is expected to use active learning teaching methods, whereas the dominant form of teaching in HU and JU is the lecture method. The reasons were stated by one KI from JU as follows: "*Staff spoke of having no option rather than using lecture*

method as class size are large. In some cases student number is larger than what is expected. About 80-90 students are learning in one classroom, especially in Engineering Technology and Natural Science colleges. Most teaching comprises lecture presentations supported by the use of chalkboard and more rarely whiteboards". This varies from college to college. For instance, in Awasa College of Agriculture, small group discussion, group assignments, practical attachments, project work, and student presentation were used continuously.

The JU self-assessment document (2008) indicates that JU uses different strategies to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. This includes classrooms equipped with LCD and white board, connected with internet; hence, teachers can easily access important documents online and display these for students. Uploading learning materials including PPT slides enables students to get access to the materials before as well as after the session. First day first class is the philosophy of JU University, but this is not practically implemented; teachers' absenteeism is common in the college. There were poor student-instructor relationships and advisory services, as reported by the interviewed group, Wireless connections for students who have personal laptops and computer access for developing assignments; term papers and senior papers help students to be smart in computer skills.

Evidence from KIs of all the case study institutions and different institutional documents indicate evaluation of teaching of teachers by students as the most effective QA practices in the case study institutions. Students, heads of department and colleagues evaluated academic staff at the end of each semester. For example, in Hawassa University evaluation by students accounts for 50%, evaluation by heads of department had a value of 35% and that by colleagues 15%. In addition, evaluation of teaching has been practised through organized meetings and discussions with students and with students' representatives from time to time. These have proven extremely valuable in obtaining feedback about teaching. Academic appraisal was also one of the mechanisms by which the SMUC ensured their quality of teaching and learning. SMUC has operated a well-documented system for evaluation for merit pay. This includes three aspects:

(1) **Teaching performance (65%):**– student evaluation (50%), head of department evaluation (15%), teaching material production (10%), practical activities for students organized by the teacher and timely submission of grades and attendance records (25%),

(2) **Research and training (25%):** – involvement in research (75%) and training (25%); and

(3**) Service (10%):** – involvement in committee work (departmental, institutional) and community service (67%) and other efforts (33%).

As a policy of the university, every subject and its corresponding teacher is evaluated once every semester, although evaluation of instructors by students is viewed by some college deans as an ineffective way of QA practice in the universities. One KI view is captured as follows:

> *Most of the times we do not get genuine comments from the students, in practice the evaluation forms are given towards the end of the class period (at the last class of the semester). The students tick mark and send the form back as quickly as possible. Hence, feedback and reality is not match so well. Sometimes we come across poor teachers but we hear of very positive comments concerning that person.*

Respondents from all four case study institutions reported that in their institutions there were also induction courses for new academic staff and ongoing professional development programs used by the case study institutions to ensure the quality of teaching. The newly recruited academic staffs were forced to take induction courses before they began teaching at the beginning of the year. In addition to induction programs, a higher diploma program (HDP) was mandatory for all academic staff carrying the teaching load. In addition to teaching formal classes, members of academic staff were expected to provide academic counselling and support to students. Departments assigned academic advisors to students at the beginning of the academic year. However, as indicated in self-evaluation documents of the case study institutions, the vast majority of instructors did not offer a consultation time for academic counselling and support to students.

In addition to interviews and information from documents, data was gathered by using a survey questionnaire from senior academic staff, faculty QA coordinators and department heads regarding mechanisms used by institutions to ensure the quality of teaching and learning (see figure 5.4.). When asked about mechanisms used by institutions to ensure the quality of teaching and learning**,** the majority of the respondents (81.9%) indicated that learner-centred teaching approaches, continuous assessment including student assignments (54%), student counselling and support systems (50%) were the major mechanisms used by the majority of higher education institutions. All HEI case study participants had their own policies to ensure quality of teaching and learning.

From both the qualitative and quantitative data, we can infer that with the exception of some colleges and departments (in the area of technology and natural science faculties in JU because of large class size), both public and private higher education institutions in Ethiopia employ learner-centred teaching approaches. Continuous assessment, academic counselling and support, evaluation of academic staff by students, heads of department and peers at the end of the semester, meeting with students and student representatives and discussion with academic staff and department heads, induction programs for new academic staff and higher diploma programs for all academic staff carrying a teaching load were the most common mechanisms to ensure the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions. However, peer evaluation was unique to St Mary's University College.

5.3.4. Quality assuring students' assessment

As indicated in DAAD (2010), the system of assessment provides individual students with adequate feedback concerning the extent to which the various learning objectives have been achieved and the system of assessment and examination provides an effective indication of whether the students have reached the expected learning outcomes of the program.

As indicated in the institutional self-assessment and strategic plan documents of the case study institutions, the common forms of assessment involve continuous (formative) as well as terminal (summative) assessment. The former is mainly for enhancing student improvement throughout the duration of a course, although often it contributes towards the final grade as well. Terminal assessment varies in the institutions from program to program. As is the case with program approval, institutional

policies place a great deal of importance on student assessment as a key aspect of the delivery process of academic departments that should have both an internal as well as an external dimension.

As stated in the institutional policy of the case studies institutions, this continuous assessment is meant to constantly give feedback to both students and lecturers so that areas for improvement can be identified before the student gets to the end of a program. Together with the entire course package, students are given the continuous assessment tasks right at the beginning of a course, with due dates for the tasks provided. Of the four case study institutions, St Mary's University College has the most comprehensive quality assurance policy on student assessment and much emphasis is placed on linking such student assessment processes with the learning outcomes and competencies required for any program. Key aspects of the system are that while assessment is used as an instrument for showing a student's level of performance in a particular area of study, it is also used to provide feedback to the student during the course of learning. Both the students and the lecturers use such feedback to improve the former in their identified areas of weakness. Thus, one of the strongest areas of the SMUC was that it has clear and published criteria for marking. It has a testing centre at institutional level which coordinates efforts at division, faculty and department levels and works towards improving the overall assessment and examination system of the UC. This idea was captured as follows:

> *SMUC has an assessment policy and clear and effective procedures for implementation. The policy and its procedure ensure academic standards in the design, approval, and implementation and review of assessment strategies for programs and modules. The UC is premised on the need to encourage a greater variety of assessment practices, to better link assessment to teaching – learning to encourage continuous learning.*

As mentioned by the QA office director, student assessment practices at SMUC sometimes rely on external examiners as well as on a wide range of internal practices that vary from faculty to faculty and discipline to discipline. The assessment practices at the institution were guided by the national policy on student assessment. When QASC requires it, SMUC could appoint external examiners to assist in maintaining assessment standards of its award-

bearing programs at a level comparable to similar programs. External examiners could be appointed for all programs where it is felt necessary. The external examiners are academic/ professional experts of high standing in relevant disciplines. They are responsible to comment and advise on the standards of the program (including all student assessment matters such as assessment methods, assessment criteria, grading systems and student performance standards). Specifically, they comment on draft examination papers and marking schemes. They also assess the overall quality of students' performance.

The continuous assessments are viewed as part of the teaching process and largely the responsibility of the instructors, while the testing centre also has a significant role to play. This includes assisting departments in designing end-of-semester standard criterion-referenced examinations. Building upon past practices, the testing centre collaborates with academic departments toward further improvement by filling gaps in the process. The assistance on the part of the centre includes continuous training support on tests preparation and associated issues. The academic vice president of the university college explained: "*In SMUC*, continuous assessment constitutes 50% and the final examination 50%. So quality assurance is a continuous process and every now and then we identify any problem in any particular course or some regulation which works against students, we look at those and see how we can improve and then we take the recommendation to the department."

According to the university QA director, Jimma University was one of the public higher education institutions that give much emphasis to students' performance assessment. In all courses in this university, course instructors or course teams have to conduct at least three (for summer) or five (for semester based courses) course assessments, excluding the summative or final examination, as part of the continuous assessments in a given semester. Hawassa University and Admas University College also use continuous assessment as a major assessment method of students' academic performance. As indicated in institutional documents, they also have a written policy on students' assessment, while continuous assessment is policy and instructors have been trained to support this. One KI from Hawassa University commented on continuous assessment as follows:

> *Continuous assessment is difficult and complex mechanism especially when it is utilized by instructors who are teaching the same course for more than two*

sections. This requires developing understanding and skills that will help instructors to apply common measurement tool and score objectively. This is possible when training opportunities are provided and guidelines are developed to support the practitioners on the actual work situation.

Based on its value, continuous assessment receives due attention in HU legislation. This is demonstrated in the modular curriculum under implementation, which accounts for 60% of the assessment allocated for it; the remaining 40% is for final examination for each course. But the maximum and minimum number of exercises to be offered in each is not strictly prescribed. Another KI from Hawassa University stated that:

The large number of assessments learners has to go through and the large number of mark records instructors have to make is one among the main challenges. Due to large number of tests and exercises that have to be marked, there is a tendency on the part of instructors to use test questions that are easier to mark. High level ability questions that involve critical thinking and problem solving skills can be used rarely. This by itself has a negative impact on quality of education.

As indicated in the quality audit report and viewed by some instructors, lack of remedial instruction based on continuous assessment was one of the major problems in the university. This is mainly associated with lack of time arising from the large number of assessment and other duties that the instructors have to carry out.

All case study institutions pursued the policy of continuous assessment. They had their own processes and procedures in implementing continuous assessment in their respective institutions. The type of continuous assessment used by the case study institutions seemed very similar, with only minor differences. However, the extent that an institution implements continuous assessment varies from institution to institution and faculty to faculty even within one institution. Apart from formative assessment of students, all case study universities have end-of-semester examinations that are quality assured through internal as well as external examination processes, whether they are in the form of sit-in examinations or examination-

equivalent papers. At the University of Jimma, Hawassa and Admas, student assessment processes are more or less the same.

Of the four case study institutions, SMUC is the only university college that has a testing centre at institutional level, while its student assessment practices sometimes rely on external examiners. Quality assurance of students' assessment through external peer reviews has helped the institution benchmark the performance of students according to international standards. In the absence of external examiners, higher education institutions use their own internal examination systems. Individual lecturers set examination questions, and then they set up a committee to look at those papers; so a sub-committee looks at each paper in terms of the quality of questions, mark allocation, relevance, etc., before they send the papers for printing. One of the faculty deans from SMUC explained the importance of external examiners to the university:

> *As we go on higher into the level of examinations, mainly the external examination system is one of the most important quality assurance mechanisms we had. I don't know, it depends on universities, but in our system here, which is a university-wide system, the examinations were set at department level. Then the department itself would look for external examiners who were approved on the basis of their outstanding academic achievement in that area of study. They were chosen from the department and approved by the faculty. They moderated the examination questions and the curriculum, and then they also came and participated in the examination and then they furnished a report at the end of their visit.*

From the aforementioned information I can conclude that all public and private higher education institutions use summative and formative types of assessment, consistent with their own written assessment policies. In all case study HEIs, continuous assessment was a major assessment method of students' academic performance; in fact, the most widely practised assessment tool across all public and private universities, while the degree varied from institution to institution.

5.3.5. Research and publication as quality assuring mechanism

One of the criteria for judging the quality of university performance is the level of research output, both in terms of quantity and quality. As indicated in the documents of the public and private case study institutions, all four had policies and guidelines that encouraged research and publishing by staff, although the University Colleges of St Mary's and Admas had comprehensive policies and a much greater focus on research than the two public institutions. They had established research and publication offices which were led by directors. Their emphasis on research was on a par with the teaching and learning activities of the university college.

One of the mission statements of the case study HEIs concerned research, consultancy and community services. For example, as indicated in their document, the vision of SMUC is to become a centre of academic excellence in research, content publishing and dissemination in higher education (SMUC Research Strategy, 2010: 34). The following is a sample of views expressed during the interview by the QA director on the engagement of the university community on research activities:

> *There has been three types of research activities in SMUC, which includes multi-disciplinary research forum which gives a chance for the university community (PhD, and MA/MSC thesis) to present their own work, research for international and national conferences in which international and national researchers can participate and contribute and the third one was student research forum which includes students' research proposal defence which accounts 40% of the research course and final research course defence which accounts 60% of the research course.*

In order to enhance the research skill of the students, all faculty students have been taking the research course with six credit hours. It has a proposal and main research defence that could be held at the institutional level. The students take a research refreshment course by experienced instructors for six weeks at the beginning of their course of study. During the main research defence, the internal and external examiners are assigned for each undergraduate student. After all graduate students have completed their research defence; the best three research papers are selected and

presented at the UC level. This was unique to St Mary's and Admas University Colleges. Instructors' engagement in research was further explained by the university college vice president as follows:

> *We are doing research at UC level in a team and individually. At least we try to attend a few conferences and from the presentations that we do, most of us are happy with the research output of the faculty. The research output is good enough; it's good enough but still our participation at national conferences and multi-disciplinary research (which focuses on institutional problems) was not very good. A lot of us involved in teaching practices inside and outside the UC that takes a lot of our time, right up to June. During the semester there is work overload.*

SMUC's annual research report (2007) indicates that to support and promote research, the university college had so far sponsored and organized nine annual national conferences. For example, according to the research and publication director of the university college, "Over eighty research papers presented during the conferences held from 2003 to \2006 have been published in the form of conference proceedings", out of which 36 were contributed by SMUC staff. These annual national research conferences have created opportunities for SMUC staff and the wider academic staff. SMUC also had a research award scheme for funding graduate and undergraduate students' theses in the area of private higher education. The university college further emphasized improving SMUC students' research skills. To this end, it conducted the first Student Research Forum on September 2, 2007. In addition to national annual conferences, the academic staff also had an opportunity to participate in monthly seminars at UC level. Instructors could present research findings, concept papers, literature reviews and experience sharing from training on the last Friday of each month to encourage research.

Similar to St Mary's University College, Admas University College had a research and publication policy and guidelines as well as short-term guidelines. The UC has a research and publication department and has a mechanism for considering the funding of research proposals. The following is a sample of views from the Dean of the Faculty of Business Education:

> *The quality of research and publication determines the quality of education in the UC. Teaching-learning process is inseparable from research and publication. Research plays a significant role to improve the teaching-learning process in any institution. Research is one way of confirming the implementation of policies, trainings, methodologies, guidelines and procedures. It helps us to study the real environment and to improve the teaching-learning process. Therefore, maintaining the quality of research in an institution is indispensable.*

Most of the interviewed faculty deans stated that AUC instructors had been involved in annual national conferences (symposiums) and monthly seminars. In this national annual conference, priority was given to UC instructors (two papers for each department). When they propose and present papers at national conferences (in a team or individually), the UC gives them an honorarium (10,000 birr) and certificate for their participation. An average of 10-15 research papers (for the national conference) is expected every year individually or in a team. AUC encourages instructors to conduct team research rather than individual work.

Similar to SMUC, AUC arranges national student conferences / symposiums. Priority is given to students from the UC who are competent in their research work (the best three students' paper selected from the UC). In Admas University College, every academic staff member is required to participate /attend the seminar at least five times in a year; it is mandatory to present a research paper within a year (25% of the research duty). The UC rewards the best researchers in the form of money and academic rank up to assistant professor and a salary increment.

JU is one of the public universities that needs to devote energy and resources to research on defined and core research areas and themes based on the priority needs of the country and the regions in consultation with the stakeholders (JU Research and Publication Policy, 2011: 6-7). One of the faculty deans stated the issue as follows: "*JU University has its own research and publication policy since 2011. Until 2011, there was no clear and written research and publication policy. This policy document has been prepared to bridge the gap*

and lay down the policy direction and guidelines that will create a conducive policy environment to advance research and community-based education."

The director for research and publication of the university (KI) stated the issue as follows: "Approval of the research work in JU should pass through three sub processes including review at departmental, [and] faculty research committee level and review at university RPC (RPO) level. The review process sees into the methodology, financial requirement and ethical issues among other things. Though there are few sub processes but the delay is too much". He further explained that JU has a research board which is responsible for managing research funds that can be accessed by academic staff for research as well as for attending conferences. "Each year, the university allocates research funds to the board, which normally is rationalized according to the number of academic staff in the university". The research and ethics board can also play the role of monitoring and evaluation to provide professional support. This includes monitoring the field or laboratory work and evaluation of whether the research project is progressing as per the proposal or objectives. The university research and publication policy encourages the engagement of all academic staff for research. Staff participation in research undertaking was limited, as staff members suffered teaching overload. In terms of quantity, about 25-30 research projects in 2004 EC were presented for public defence. This varies from college to college. However, following the absence of funds, the number of research projects being carried out in the college is being reduced. One KI from the area indicated that only about 1-10% of the academic staff was engaged in research activities. The reasons listed for this low proportion were indicated as lack of research funds, unattractive environment for research, unavailability of laboratory equipment, chemicals and other inputs, lack of training and research skills, lack of experienced staff for guidance, attrition of experienced staff and poor research culture.

Another KI from faculty deans commented that the research culture was not well developed in the university and very few staff was involved in undertaking research, something which needs to be changed soon. But in Jimma Agricultural College, the culture of research is different from other colleges. The college has devised the following strategies for maximizing staff participation in research: "*The development of Research Excellency Award- where the best academic staff in research*

nominated for the award in each year. The college has a guiding document for the reward, active encouragement from heads in arranging facilities for the research". The college disseminated its research output to the end users via publishing in journals, and presenting at the university's annual research symposium and locally available mass media. For instance, the college was utilizing Jimma Community Radio to teach the community in national and regional languages about the production of quality hens, flowers, honey and coffee.

In its mission, Hawassa University aspires to being one of the best higher learning institutions in Africa and a centre of excellence in teaching and research. The Research, Extension and Publication Committee (REPC) has a very important role to play if the university is to be regarded as a centre of research excellence. There is no doubt that the university is engaged in research. This is focused strongly in the College of Agriculture. The College Research and Development Coordination Offices (RDC) are accountable to the RDD and have a mandate to coordinate all research activities in the respective college. Each department also has a team composed of relevant professionals from each program. The team sets priority research areas, evaluates and selects research proposals for funding, and guides all of the departmental research and development activities (HU Research Strategy, 2010: 6-7).

Overall, the proportion of staff involved in research was less than 50%. The senate legislation of the university states that the teaching staff members of the university are expected to engage in research activities. Even though teaching staff members are not expected to be engaged in work for more than 30% of the workload, this expectation is not being met. Faculty engagement on research was viewed by the university research and publication directorate (KI) as follows:

> *Five years ago, faculty of engineering, law, business and economics had young staff; their capacity to involve in research was very low. Hence, the university planned to provide trainings to this young and other staff on how to write scientific research, how to write research proposals. As a result of this training the participation of academic staff in research increased from time to time. For*

example, in 2002, 42 and in 2004, 107 research projects were funded by the university from regular budget.

In the interviews with faculty deans of education and natural science, they put the idea as follows:

In Hawassa University, there are no significant incentives that can be given to academic staff for research and publication. In fact, this culture is one of the major factors undermining research excellence at the university. Staff members also not engaged in consultancy work, which is financially rewarding, than in research and publishing, where they enjoy no monetary benefits. Most members of staff expressed concern over lack of incentives for research and publications. The only incentives are in the form of promotions or things like that. And also if you get promoted to the next rank, the gap in salary is just insignificant.

The university has links and research collaboration in Ethiopia and other countries. This collaboration provides funding, training, and technical and manageriall support. The research and publication director further elaborated: "*We have international links and joint projects with NORD (Swedish and Norwegian Agency, NUFU (Norwegian Centre for Higher Education), Oklahoma University, and universities in Holland, New Zealand and the USA. Now about 27 PhD and 105 master's students are funded by these organizations and universities*." Nationally, the university collaborates with local institutions such as the Southern Agricultural Research Institute, and the Bureau of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR). The preparation of international conferences, and symposiums, and scientific forums was unsatisfactory. For example, in 2010 an international conference was held in Hawassa HAIC sponsored by Hawassa University. This was the only international conference noted by the university research and publication director.

In order to triangulate the data from the interviews with academic vice presidents and QA managers and institutional documents, data was gathered from senior academic staff, department heads and faculty QA coordinators regarding the process of ensuring the quality

of research in their institutions. As indicated in figure 5.6, when asked whether or not they had specific processes in place with regard to QA in research, they responded in the affirmative. The most common processes were internal seminars where research projects and ideas were discussed, external peer review or inviting external peers, and internal peer review of research projects.

Both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that the majority of higher education institutions in Ethiopia used internal seminars for the discussion of research projects and ideas. A significant number of respondents indicated that HEIs used external review or invited external peers but the idea was not supported by interviews and documents of all case study institutions. Only the interviewed respondents from SMUC and AUC indicated that they were inviting external peers for research project approval.

Apart from teaching, all case study institutions attached a great deal of importance to research that supports the teaching service and contribute to the development of knowledge. They also have a structures with different names; for example, in JU a research and ethical board that has a mandate to manage the research funds accessed by academic staff for research. In Hawassa University, the Research and Development Coordination Office (RDC) has a mandate to coordinate all research activities.

The main activities of research differed from one institution to another. In St Mary's and Admas University Colleges these included organizing multi-disciplinary research forums, national and international conferences, national student research forums, students' research and assigning internal and external examiners for each graduate student and monthly seminars, but in the participating public higher education institutions like JU and HU, organizing international and national research conferences was not the culture of the university. In JU, Community Based Student Research was widely practised. In all case study institutions approval of research projects or work passed through review at department, faculty research committee and at university level.

The main mechanisms of encouraging staff involvement in research at the institutional level were supporting staff through awarding the best researcher in the form of incentives (cash and salary increment) and academic ranks, staff development programs that involved

research workshops, sending staff abroad for PhD and masters studies. However, the degree of involvement varied from institution to institution.

In general, the senate legislation of all higher education institutions states that academic staff members are expected to engage in research activities (25% of teaching load). However, these expectations are not met. For example, in JU and HU the staff participation in research was limited (not more than 10%). Nevertheless, the participation of staff in research in both private university colleges was better than in public universities. Both universities were exceptional among the four case study universities in that they were research universities with priority focus on research output. The low participation of the academic staff in research was because of the absence of adequate incentive systems, academic staff overload, the insignificant salary gap between academic ranks, and the absence of adequate funds.

5.3.6. Tracer study /graduate studies

Student surveys (follow-up studies) are predicated on the importance of seeking feedback from students (as customers and clients) to determine their satisfaction. Since only students can provide a viewpoint as the immediate recipients, it must be seen as a significant dimension to assess the quality of a program. Survey studies are undertaken at various stages of the students' experiences whilst studying in the institutions and thereafter (SMUC, 2009: 15).

As mentioned in the institutional documents and interview results from the case study institutions, Jimma University, Admas University College and St Mary's University College have conducted student surveys as a mechanism to maintain the quality of their programs. For example, in Jimma University (JU), internal quality assessment was conducted in 2007 and the subsequent external quality audit in 2008 (HERQA, 2008:15), while the evaluation of the Business Process Re-Engineering Implementation (JU, 2011: 30), in accordance with HERQA's focus areas, demonstrate the University's attempts in assessing the quality of education it is providing. Jimma University has not yet undertaken a comprehensive graduates' tracer study. In such circumstances, it is difficult for the University to speak openly about the quality and relevance of education it is offering without tracking down graduates from diversified fields in diversified areas and assessing their competencies in a real

workplace. For this reason, JU conducted a tracer study in 2011 (JU Tracer Study Document, 2012).

One KI from the QA Office of St Mary's University College mentioned that a students' satisfaction survey was conducted by SMUC's Centre for Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA) in 1999. This tracer study indicated areas in which students were not satisfied. According to the view of the KI and the quality assurance manual document, feedback from employers constitutes another kind of institutional quality assurance mechanism. According to SMUC's student survey, "*many private and public organizations have been showing interest to employ our graduates. The UC have received many employment requests every year*". As the KI indicated, the information obtained from employers indicated that the students of the university college were capable of performing assigned tasks, eager to learn from others, committed and cooperative with company employees. The information received from the employers was also used as input to make readjustments on course offerings. Even though the student survey study started in three case study institutions, namely in SMUC, AUC and Jimma University, as a quality assurance mechanism, institutions had not used the student feedback questionnaire. The tracer study was also not used frequently by institutions. It was a one shot activity, not taken as a culture in maintaining the quality of their institutions through conducting tracer studies.

5.3.7. Commitment of top managers to QA

The commitment of leaders can be defined as their agreement or pledge to do something in the future. The following indicators are crucial with regard to the commitment of leaders. First, it can be measured by whether the leaders clearly expressed their commitment in the quality manuals of their HEIs. Second, I looked at the assurance of appropriate resources (money, time, infrastructure and staff) for quality implementation; this may include the appointment of fulltime staff committed to implementing QA systems. Third, the position of quality leaders and the quality committee within HEIs signals the commitment of leaders concerning quality assurance implementation. Commitment in this study means

Establishing comprehensive QA systems,
Assigning resources (financial, time and money) for QA,
Assigning human resources (quality reviewers) for QA,

Developing quality manuals /guidelines,

Establishing QA committees at faculty and department levels,

Providing training for quality reviewers and academic staff and non-academic units for effective implementation of institutional QA system and

Practically conducting internal quality audits in their respective institution

The more the activities mentioned above can be observed within an organization, the more the leaders are committed to quality assurance implementation.

As it emerged from the data gathered through interviews and documents from the case study institutions, top managers of St Mary's and Admas Private University Colleges were more committed to quality issues than the other two case study's public universities. The top management of these two university colleges was highly committed to the implementation of the QA system. Some of the indicators /evidences observed were the establishment of a comprehensive QA system in their UC; assignment of fulltime QA directors and experts who were well paid; the QAO has been accountable to the university president in the case of Admas University College for close monitoring and support and to the academic vice president in the case of SMUC; adequate resources were assigned for the implementation of QA systems, QA reviewers, academic staff and non-academic units received training, by inviting experts from the area from inside and outside the university colleges. A sample of the views expressed regarding commitment is indicated below:

If you have good leaders, then quality takes care of itself. If you don't have good leaders, no amount of report writing and form-filing is going to bring about quality. Efforts to raise the quality assurance processes as I have read, tend to put more and more pressure on the people at the bottom of the academic hierarchy, the ones who do most of the teaching and are supposed to be most active in research. The pressure, in my view, should be on the people at the top to ensure quality. They provide the academic leadership, institutional stability and efficiency. So our managers are committed to quality assurance from the outset.

According to the information provided by the academic president of the UC, SMUC has set up an institutional QA office headed by one fulltime senior quality assurance director. The QA office comes under the overall direction and guidance of the director for quality assurance. Three fulltime experts have also been employed to monitor and support the QA process of the university college. The Centre for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA) coordinates the total quality management system of the institution and oversees the implementation of the college-wide quality assurance activities based on QA manuals and guidelines. The UC has developed a QA manual and guideline based on the national framework, which serves as a framework for institutional quality management.

The faculties have also established their own quality enhancement committee or Faculty Quality Assessment Unit (FQAU). The FQAU oversees quality operations at faculty and department levels. FQAU meets to approve quality assessment results and to review the operation of the program on a regular basis. The quality assurance process was not limited to academic units; the administrative QA unit (AQAU) was also obliged to audit the service and support system of the UC in order to assure its functions that support the UC mission. Quality activities received the appropriate support and human and financial resources for doing quality work. For example, the existence of a written institutional quality manual was a clear expression of the leaders' and academics' commitment concerning quality assurance implementation.

Another indicator of the commitment of institutional leaders was that external consultants were invited to support and audit the whole implementation process. At the beginning, they offered training for staff members, and then helped in developing quality assurance processes, procedures and the quality manual, and in implementing the quality management system. As one KI from faculty deans stated, the external consultants positively influenced the quality management implementation process.

Admas University College was another private institution committed to quality. The AUC top managers were aware of their responsibility; the academic vice president of the UC said that without a comprehensive QA system, maintaining the quality of education is unthinkable. Because of the efforts made by the university college, a QA system was developed in the university college before the government put pressure on HEIs to establish the system in

their respective universities. Currently, the university upgraded the QA system from a QA department to a QA office run by QA director. The institutional QA office is accountable to the UC president's office, under the close monitoring of the university president and closely supported by the president's office. This indicates that the university gave significant attention to the QA system in the university college. Like SMUC, the AUC QA office had one director and other QA experts who were fulltime employers in the area. The quality assurance office was also financially supported, with their own regular budget assigned by the UC from their internal revenue.

The commitment of QA managers in Jimma University differs from the two private university colleges in the case study. There were two distinct views regarding the commitment of managers. The university QA director and faculty quality coordinators and faculty deans expressed diverging views, for example; the university QA office director viewed the commitment of managers as follows:

> *The university top management has a positive attitude towards the internal and external QA systems because they realize that in this globalized world or 21st century in which graduates of the university compete internationally, nationally and locally, quality education is impossible without the comprehensive quality assurance system. According to him, the academic programs and quality assurance office prepare an action plan for internal quality assessment, the necessary financial and human resources and submit to the university top management, the top management of the university are positive to assign finance and human power to implement the system effectively.*

The director further explained: "We also established institutional QA system and assigned faculty quality coordinators (Faculty QA office), assigned internal quality auditors in the form of committee by selecting professionals from different disciplines or faculties." According to the academic programs and quality assurance office director, one of the best examples that indicate the commitment of university top management was the tracer study conducted in 2011 in Diredewa, Awasa, Bahirdar, Addis Ababa and Adama. In addition, the internal reviewers received an incentive in the form of cash and scholarships. They also assigned senior academic staff (quality reviewers) for internal quality audit. But he didn't hide that it

was difficult to get experienced and knowledgeable academics in the area of quality assurance. On the other hand, KIs from faculty QA coordinators and faculty deans summarized the commitment of top managers of JU in the following ways: The top management of the university put emphasis on QA when MOE (HERQA) put pressure on them. When HERQA and MOE are silent about QA, the university also cools down the situation. They are not doing it on their own initiative. So the commitment of top managers of the university depends on the attention of the state and the National Quality Assurance Agency.

They further explained that the top management of the university did not understand the importance of maintaining quality and the way quality is assured. Most of the training was given to very few members of top management of the university. Training was limited to the university's top management, with no tradition to pass on the training to middle managers and academics at university level. There was no way for academic staff and middle managers to get training on QA. Financial problems were another constraint explained by respondents. One KI stated that, "*Quality review is an extra- work for academic staff and QA office needs its own separate budget, but top managers of the university denied this fact and failed to assign budget for institutional QA office up to faculty level*." There is no incentive for academics who were involved in the work of quality review in the form of cash, promotion, scholarships. It was not even included in teachers' performance evaluation, and seemed to be a free service. The issue of quality did not receive due attention.

Another KI from the agricultural college also explained that "the selection of institutional quality reviewers was not based on merit, seniority, experience and HERQA's guideline; it was based on goodwill of the institutional QA office." Even the QA guideline was prepared by inappropriate instructors, and still needed revision. There was no participation of academics in the preparation of the QA guideline. Therefore, from the point of view of the above-mentioned respondents and the existing situations observed in the university, I can infer that the commitment of top managers of Jimma University was not adequate for implementing the internal quality assurance system; it was certainly not as expected by the stockholders.

In Hawassa University, the view of respondents on the commitment of the university's top management of the can be condensed as follows: The university quality assurance office

was already established, and a senior quality assurance director was assigned; the QA activities came under the overall direction and guidance of the director. In addition to this, at faculty level, faculty quality assurance coordinators were assigned and quality assurance manual /guideline also prepared. However, what was put on paper was not translated into practice. Until the data was gathered for this research project, no internal quality audit had been conducted except in 2007. As indicated by SED (2007), in 2007 the internal quality audit was conducted due to pressure from the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA). The system of internal QA was not functional. The current attention of the university management was focused on a modular approach to teaching and learning, on the preparation of modules and monitoring guidelines, rather than checking the quality of the institution. The majority of the interviewed respondents were generally agreed that no effective QA system existed in Hawassa University.

In conclusion, it can be stated that all the case study institutions have developed processes to monitor quality. However, reports on quality evaluation results, making final decisions to implement QA system, and assigning appropriate human and financial resources were the major problems observed in public universities. This also reflects the extent of the commitment to quality of the top managements of the universities. There was a significant difference between private university colleges and public universities. Private university colleges were more committed to quality than public HEIs. On the part of public HEIs, insufficient commitment from the leadership was observed. The leaders only expressed their commitment concerning QA implementation in the quality manual (on paper). The quality policy was not translated into practical implementation. In private higher education institutions, the leadership commitment was high. The scope of quality management was wider.

The adequacy of quality management mechanisms is connected to neo-institutional theory, namely, to the question whether this system works symbolically or genuinely. The findings coincide with the neo-institutional theory that the higher the commitment of leaders, the faster the implementation of the system. The system works genuinely in private university colleges and symbolically in public universities. The findings of the study also agree with Allison’s

decision-making process model which advocates that “the effectiveness and efficiency” of the QA process requires leaders who are committed to the issue and provide necessary resources inside the organization. The role of the leaders, especially their commitment, is essential for organizational success in implementing QA mechanisms.

5.3.8. Impact of internal and external QA systems on higher education

A fundamental question in relation to the development of QA systems in higher education is whether or not the external and internal QA systems have any impact on the quality of higher education itself, in particular the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum design and review and research activities of the institution (El-khawas et al. 1998: 70).

The impact of quality assurance systems on tertiary education is difficult to assess because it is difficult to isolate such impact from other forces affecting higher education or many other changes which HEIs are experiencing (Askling 1997 and Shah 1998). In Ethiopian HEIs there are other internal influences that impact on the quality of education, namely the business process re-engineering (BPR), the modular approach and strategic planning.

The information gathered from documents of the case study institutions and interview participants indicates that the impact of internal and external QA systems differs from one institution to another i because the four case study institutions were at different stages of QA implementation. Some have developed a comprehensive QA system and practically put the system into practice, while other case study institutions, particularly the public universities, had no comprehensive QA system and QA implementation was not genuine but symbolic. Therefore, the impact differs from institution to institution. For example, in SMUC most participants of the study (KI) unequivocally stated that there was a definite improvement of teaching and learning as a result of external and internal QA processes. A selected view is stated below.

> *The establishment of QA system nationally and institutionally has a far reaching positive impact on my institution. The concepts of quality and quality assurance system were embedded in the mind of academic staff members and UC managers. Since SMUC is the pioneer of QA system in the country, many public and private HEIs have shared or learned a lot of things from this UC regarding QA system. As a result of QA*

system the number of publications increased (number of journals and articles), student service and support system also improved.

Another KI characterized the impact of the QA process as follows:

> *It is difficult to discern the impact of QA system; we can't ignore all of the other systems that led towards the outcome or good teaching practice. In reality, after the establishment of QA process in our UC, the institutional management system improved, strategic plan has been strengthened and the awareness of the academic staff on quality increased. The external QA also impact up on university performance through its influence on the UC internal processes through accreditation.*

The ideas raised by respondents of SMUC were also supported by another KI from Admas University College. According to the view of this KI, "*the impact of external and internal quality assurance brought significant change in the performance of Admas University College*". This includes: the UC academic and management systems, the teaching and learning process, assessment systems; each manager of the UC, academic staff and students are aware of the concept of quality and how to implement quality assurance systems.

Another view raised by AUC quality assurance office director was that, "Thanks to the introduction of quality assessment system at national and institutional levels, more attention was given to the teaching function, students' academic support service, staff recruitment and development and transparency of the management system of the institution." Other KIs from AUC further explained the idea that outstanding improvements have occurred in the teaching environment. These include curriculums made relevant to the needs of society, improvement of student assessment system, pedagogical skill of instructors also improved and increased responsibility for improving quality in teaching and learning at individual, academic unit, faculty and institutional levels. The quality of the work process of the UC was improved /changed; the academic, non-academic staff and top managers of the UC committed to their own duties struggled to implement their action plans, or think about improvement. The QA

system became the culture of the UC; overall, the emergence of the new system brought a high impact on teaching and learning, assessment, research and service delivery of the UC. The working culture of the university changed, including the attitudes of academic and non-academic staff.

In Jimma and Hawassa public universities the interviewed respondents, including the university quality assurance directors, didn't respond to the question raised regarding the impact of external and internal QA systems on the quality of education and management as a whole. In these universities, internal quality audit was not conducted regularly – both internal and external quality audits were conducted only in 2007 and 2008. According to them, it is impossible to see the impact of the system on quality of education and organizational management because they did not fully implement the system in their university on a continuous basis; such a one shot activity might not have any effect on institutional performance. They conducted an internal quality audit in 2007 when they were requested to do so by HERQA. After HERQA conducted an external quality audit in 2008, the top management of the university had forgotten the issue of quality. They responded that they had recently set up a comprehensive QA system at institutional and faculty levels but it was still not active on the ground. Hence, the impact of external and internal QA systems was not clearly indicated by the key informants of these universities.

The overall analysis from the two private university colleges confirmed that the establishment of external and internal QA systems had an impact on professional practices, strengthened the evaluation system of the university, as well as teaching and learning, while the concept of quality and QA systems were embedded in the minds of academic and non-academic staff, QA managers and policy makers; institutional management and the strategic plan had been strengthened, quality was on the agenda of the institutional management, student assessment systems had changed, student academic support systems improved and instructors' pedagogical skills improved.

5.4. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE QA SYSTEMS IN HEIS

Compared to more developed higher education systems in the world, QA systems in Ethiopia are still in their infancy and thus confronted by many challenges. Data was gathered on factors that influence QA systems in the Ethiopian national QA agency and HEIs from

national and institutional quality assurance managers through interviews and from faculty QA coordinators, department heads and senior academic staff through survey questionnaires. The data gathered through interviews indicates that those factors that influence the internal QA systems vary from one institution to another. However, common major problems were identified from the case study institutions. These include perceptions of academics about current QA systems; the turnover of institutional QA coordinators; as well as the lack of:

Commitment from top management of the institutions;
Training and experience in QA;
Financial resources for internal QA implementation;
Experienced professionals in the area of quality assurance;
Incentives for internal quality reviewers;
Follow-up measures on the parts of the government and national QA agency;
Competition and reward (incentive) systems;
Fulltime employees in quality assurance systems at institutional level

The major problems raised by the national QA agency (HERQA) during an interview were human capacity (shortage of experts) to conduct an external quality audit in all private and public higher education institutions, low salaries of professionals who were working in the agency, and the autonomy of HERQA.

In addition to the interviews with institutional quality managers, data regarding factors that influence the implementation of QA systems in higher education institutions was gathered through questionnaires from department heads, faculty quality coordinators and academic staff. As shown in figure 4.7, respondents indicated that in public HEIs, a lack of financial resources for internal quality review, appropriate training and experience on QA, commitment of institutional leaders and follow-up on the part of government were the major problems identified. In private HEIs, the lack of appropriate training and experience in QA, incentives for quality reviewers, and finance for internal QA were the major problems observed.

Both the qualitative (interview) and quantitative (questionnaire) data indicates that the lack of financial resources for internal QA implementation, commitment from institutional leaders, training and experience in QA, incentives for internal quality reviewers, follow-up and

measures on the parts of the government and national QA agency were the major factors that influenced the internal QA system of higher education institutions. The degree of seriousness of the problem varies from one institution to another and particularly between public and private institutions. From the identified problems, the three most serious ones underlined by the respondents from public universities were the lack of financial resources for internal QA implementation, commitment of institutional leaders and follow-up on the part of government. On the other hand, the two most serious problems observed by private HEIs were the lack of appropriate training and experience in QA, and incentives for quality reviewers. The resource dependence theory and decision-making process model of bureaucratic decision-making supported the results of the study. The underlying argument is that in order to survive, institutions need sufficient resources, which often cannot be produced by the institutions themselves; therefore, they must interact with other organizations that control these resources, and consequently they are dependent on them. It follows that leaders' commitment has a substantial positive and negative effect on QA implementation. This study suggests that the more dependent institutions were on government for financial resources, the slower they implemented QA systems because of the lack of commitment on the part of institutional leaders to assign adequate financial resources for QA. That is why the implementation of QA systems was slow in Ethiopian public HEIs and fast in private HEIs. Unlike public HEIs, private HEIs did not depend on government resources.

Although the seriousness of the problem varies from public institutions to private institutions, we can infer from the data that the four most influential factors affecting the effective implementation of internal QA systems in Ethiopian higher education institutions include the lack of financial resources for internal quality review, lack of appropriate training and experience in QA, lack of commitment of institutional leaders and absence of follow-up on the part of the government or the national QA agency.

5.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed internal and external QA practices through eight internal and four external analytical categories formed by regrouping the themes identified in the four case studies of this project. The new groupings were classified as (1) the internal QA system,

which includes: trends in internal QA systems, commitment of managers, the impact of QA systems, and major activities of internal QA; (2) the external QA system, which includes: the introduction and national need for QA, the role of the National Quality Assurance Agency, accreditation and its impact, and problems and issues related to EQA system; (3) factors that influenced the effective implementation of QA systems.

The findings of this research showed that there are two major approaches through which quality assurance practices in the four higher education institutions are implemented. These approaches consist of internal as well as external processes. External forms of quality assuring the same core activities of the universities were mainly in the form of external quality audit by the National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA). Although there were similarities in terms of the quality assurance practices and structures among the two public universities and two private university colleges, there were also significant differences regarding the rigour of the processes. At the private university colleges, there was a distinct culture of rigorous implementation of quality assurance in all aspects of university academic business through internal self-scrutiny that was supported by external peer reviews. In this sense, practice closely resembled the procedures outlines in the quality manual or guideline. In the public Universities, the practices were different: the implementation on the ground diverged from the published quality guidelines; implementation seemed merely symbolic. In both public institutions, there was a significant mismatch between the written quality assurance manual and the actual practices in the academic units. The role of external review by the national QA agency was not very significant in public higher education institutions but important in private higher education institutions because of the presence of quality assurance measures such as the accreditation system.

The next chapter presents a conclusion, summary and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

As a conclusion to the study, this chapter summarizes the main findings presented in Chapters Five and Six. These findings are based on the descriptions and observations made by the participants on their own experiences and perceptions of quality assurance. The findings emerged from the responses of QA managers and academics during the interviews combined with the information gleaned from institutional and national documents and survey questionnaires as documented in the previous chapter. Finally, this chapter also provides some recommendations based on these findings on how internal and external QA systems can work in higher education institutions and on how to improve the major factors that influenced the internal and external QA systems.

6.2. GENERAL CONCLUSION

Quality education in Ethiopia since 2003 has been a concept, not a practice. Higher Education Proclamation 351 (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2003) made provision for the creation of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and this was established in 2003 (Higher Education Proclamation no. 351/2003) with the aim of safeguarding and enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in the country. Its mission includes ensuring that accredited HEIs are of an appropriate standard, and that the programs of study offered by HEIs are of an appropriate quality and relevance to the world of work and the development needs of the country.

The research findings of the study show that the practice of QA systems started in private university colleges in 2004 with the support of external consultants, and after 2005 in public universities under pressure exerted by the government. Today assurance practices are carried out in Ethiopian higher education institutions through two major approaches. These include internal as well as external processes. The core internal QA activities in both public and private HEIs are teaching and learning, curriculum approval and review, students'

academic performance assessment, research and publication, student support systems, and academic staff performance appraisal.

According to a systems-based approach, higher education institutions are assessed within the context of the goals to be achieved, and this will vary by institutions and even by program. Cleary (2001: 44) comments, “There are really no ‘all purpose’ measures for assessing institutional quality across all institutions of higher education. Institutions must expend the effort to define for themselves what constitutes quality”. In line with this theory, the research findings of this study indicate that even though all the case study institutions have their own aims, goals and objectives set by the institutions themselves and have established their own quality assurance structures, they all define quality in terms of “fitness for purpose”.

While there were similarities in terms of QA practices and structures among the four higher education institutions, there were significant differences regarding the actual practices. At the St Mary’s and Admas Private University Colleges, there was a distinct culture of thorough implementation of quality assurance systems through internal quality review supported by external quality audit. In this sense, practice resembled the QA manual and the goals and objectives of the institution. At Jimma and Hawassa Public Universities, however, the role of external quality audit was insignificant; there was no continuous support and follow-up on the part of the National Quality Assurance Agency. The practical implementation of internal QA systems seemed merely symbolic (on paper). There was a significant gap between stipulations of the QA manual and practices on the ground. This supports the neo-institutional theory of symbolic compliance. In public universities, there was a significant mismatch between the written quality manual/ guideline and the actual practices of quality assurance systems on the ground.

A systems approach to quality and Decision making process model advocate that any system of quality control or consumer protection in tertiary education will fall short if it is not backed by the commitment of the institution to deliver educational services of the highest quality possible within the given context. The institutional responsibility towards quality in itself is fundamental. The institution’s public responsibility, accountability and internalized quality culture will always need to be the basis of any effective system of quality control

(OECD, 2003: 29). Kells (1994:11) states that a successful self-regulation system depends directly upon the extent to which the institutional leaders, both managerial
and academic, can design a system of quality assessment that will enable it to keep control of its destiny, to build further strength and to respond to the challenges it faces. The research findings indicate that private university colleges were more committed to quality than public HEIs, with insufficient commitment from the leadership of public universities. The leaders expressed their commitment concerning QA implementation only in the quality manual (on paper); however, the quality manual was not translated into practical implementation. According to Neo-institutional theory symbolic compliance may be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy or survival. Therefore, management techniques implemented, i.e. quality improvement programs, may help higher education institutions to manage the impression that outsiders have about them, even if they exist more on paper than in practice. Thus, a higher education institution can satisfy external demands for increased accountability to stakeholders by apparently adopting but not genuinely implementing programs that address their interests. If that is the case, the implementation of quality management mechanisms can be seen as “symbolically mediated change processes which can be understood only if we uncover the action-motivation reasons that guide efforts to alleviate practical problems” (Dunn, 1993: 259). This study also found that QA implementation was symbolic particularly in public higher education institutions.

In the view of respondents from public HEIs, the top management of the university needs pressure from the state to bring the issues of quality to institutional attention, or to get quality on the agenda of the institutional management. In private higher education institutions, high leadership commitment was evident. The scope of quality management was wider. Most of the respondents from private university colleges agreed that a quality assurance culture had been developed in private HEIs due to the pressure put on them by the state or the national QA agency through accreditation.

6.3. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions. The focus of the study was to maintain and raise the quality of education in degree-granting public and private higher education institutions by encouraging

policy makers to establish an effective quality assurance system at national and institutional levels. The research study intended to provide suggestions and recommendations that would hopefully change the view of policy makers and professionals towards the implementation of QA systems. Therefore, I addressed the research questions below to achieve these aims.

The main research question

What are the current status and practices of national and institutional quality assurance systems in Ethiopia?

The sub-questions

What is the nature of internal and external quality assurance practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions and at national level?

What are the major activities of internal quality assurance processes covered in Ethiopian higher education institutions?

What is the perceived impact of current national and institutional quality assurance systems on teaching and learning, student assessment, research activities and management systems?

To what extent are top managements of HEIs committed to enhancing the implementation of quality assurance systems?

Are there differences between public and private higher education institutions in practising quality assurance systems in their respective institutions?

What are the major factors that influence the effective implementation of internal and external quality assurance systems at national and institutional levels?

Based on the analysis and interpretations presented in Chapters Four and Five, the major findings of the study are presented below.

6.3.1. Role of the external quality assurance agency

Although the established law describes the national QA agency (HERQA) as an independent body to safeguard the quality of higher education institutions and accredit private higher education institutions, respondents from the national QA agency and institutional quality managers had different views. They responded that, in realty, the existing national QA agency (HERQA) was highly dependent on government or highly influenced by government bodies. Government appointed top management of the agency, which depended on public funding. The agency was not independent in making decisions, but reported any quality audit results to the state ministry for action or decision. Based on the recommendations of HERQA, the state ministry might react on the assessment outcomes.

The standards formulated by the national QA agency and applied by institutions were mainly input and process based, with little attention paid to output and outcomes. The most common QA standards were HERQA's ten focus areas, including the vision, mission and educational goals. The findings of this study suggest that the absence of a national QA policy plays a strong impeding role in policy development and implementation at many higher education institutions. The government did not develop a national education quality policy and framework (QA model) that higher education institutions could use in the course of their quality management activities. As a result, the case study institutions failed to develop their own QA policies and QA models that could serve as a framework to maintain the quality of their educational offerings. It created confusion for HEIs and national QA agency experts on the subject of whether HERQA's ten focus areas should serve as a quality model or as quality standards.

6.3.2. Internal quality assurance practices

The quality of higher education and the need for effective QA mechanisms at national and institutional levels are becoming priority themes in national strategies for higher education. This is driven by the importance attached to higher education as a driver of growth on one hand and the emergence of new types of higher education providers (beyond public higher education institutions) on the other. As a result, the concept of quality assurance systems was introduced into Ethiopia by outsiders, particularly by the VSO group and UK experts. Experiences were also shared from South Africa and Ireland. Structured QA processes in

higher education institutions and at national level are recent phenomena in Ethiopia and in higher education institutions. At the national level, a QA system was established in 2003 (HERQA); the agency has been keeping an eye on quality assurance in both public and private higher education institutions since its establishment. The data gathered in this study through interviews, documents and questionnaires from private HEIs indicates that, at institutional level, QA systems were first established in 2004 by private university colleges (St Mary's and Admas) with the support of external experts. Although the majority of the public and private universities and university colleges established their QA systems within the last six years, private university colleges in the case study such as SMUC and AUC are considered as the pioneers of internal QA systems in the country. However, there are higher education institutions who have still not established their own functional internal QA systems.

A working definition of quality as a concept is essential for the development of a QA manual and framework if the QA system is to achieve a degree of success. The majority of institutional quality managers and faculty quality coordinators of the case study institutions, particularly from public HEIs, reported that they were unaware of the concepts of quality and quality assurance. During interviews, individuals from different institutions defined the concept of quality in diverse ways. This indicates that there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of the concept of quality at all the case study institutions (they were not aware of HERQA's "fitness for purpose" definition of quality). This could be attributed to the failure of university managements to provide an operational or practical definition of quality that would suit their vision and mission.

At national level, one type of quality assurance practice can be observed for public HEIs: the institutional quality audit. There was no institutional or program accreditation for public higher education institutions. For private HEIs, three different types of quality assurance practices were observed: institutional quality audits (similar to public HEIs), institutional accreditation, and program accreditation. But the approaches or methodologies used for internal quality audit were similar within both kinds of institutions. Evidence from the higher education institutions that participated in the case study shows that the national QA agency (HERQA) follows the same basic approach for EQA of private and public HEIs, at the same time, higher education institutions follow the same approach to conduct their own self-assessment;

they all use HERQA's ten focus areas as key quality standards for both EQ audit and institutional self-assessment.

Standards can be useful because they provide an institution with a clear idea of an "ideal" end point, something towards which to strive. In addition, the more particular the standards, the more specific the outcome that can be anticipated as a result of compliance (Carole, 2003: 298).Standards are considered as quality indicators that provide indications about certain common aspects of institutional functioning. As a result, a quality indicator may have to be operational zed according to the practices carried out within an institution. The findings of the study (data from documents and interviews) indicate that higher education institutions were not using quality standards or quality indicators in their quality assurance systems. The key quality areas were identified by the national QA agency (HERQA). Based on these key areas of quality, HEIs should have developed their own quality aspects and quality indicators for each key area of quality. However, the quality managers of both private and public HEIs did not understand the meaning of the terms quality standard or quality indicators. They simply listed the ten focus areas of HERQA in their QA manual. There was no evidence to indicate the extent of their achievement in all major activities of quality. None of the institutions had standard requirements for HERQA's ten focus areas. The absence of quality indicators for quality standards opens up the possibility of subjective interpretation and undoubtedly puts significant pressure on internal quality reviewers to make judgments about what is reasonable.

6.3.3. Major internal QA activities

The major quality assurance activities and the most crucial elements determining the quality of education in higher education institutions are curriculum development and revision, teaching and learning, students' assessment process, research and publication, graduates and academic performance assessment. I discuss the results from the data gathered in this study below.

Higher education institutions are expected to develop their curriculum through various course approval processes. Furthermore, the curriculum should be regularly evaluated; revision of curriculum should take place at reasonable times. The findings of the study indicate that in all four case study institutions due emphasis was placed on quality assuring course

development activities, and various mechanisms and processes were undertaken to ensure the quality of a program. The process of course approval involves academic committee structures that operate at different levels within the university. Course approval starts at department levels, proceeds through faculty council, and then passes to the senate for approval. In addition to internal processes, external experts from other universities and organizations participate in quality assuring of courses in St Mary's and Admas Private University Colleges. The absence of external review was a major setback in Hawassa and Jimma public universities in terms of quality assuring their programs. In public HEIs, the existing curriculum was revised intermittently and informally, based on the interests of instructors; in private HEIs, the curriculum was revised at regular intervals and sometimes upon completion of the program.

Higher education institutions have placed a lot of emphasis on aspects of teaching and learning in ensuring the quality of education. All the case study institutions had a teaching-learning delivery policy and guidelines. As indicated in the qualitative and quantitative data, the most common approaches employed by Ethiopian HEIs in quality assuring teaching and learning were the following: monitoring and assessment of academic staff performance every semester by the head of department, peers and students; implementing active learning approaches; induction programs for newly recruited academic staff; student advice systems; higher diploma programs (for in-service professional development); continuous assessment; academic counselling and support; and practical experiences.

The external reviews of the actual teaching process (where the external reviewers observe classroom teaching) and motivation systems (performance-based rewards that encourage good teaching practice), and graduate survey studies were not common in Ethiopian HEIs. The case study institutions had no quality indicators or follow-up mechanisms by which they could ensure the implementation of these trends. For example, while the teacher-centred approach is the philosophy of most higher education institutions, there was no quality indicator or evidence of active learning approaches in any of the case study institutions.

One of the criteria for judging the quality of a university's performance is the level of research output in terms of both quality and quantity. Research can support teaching and learning and contribute to the common wealth of knowledge. The research findings show that all the case

study institutions had policy and research guidelines to encourage research and publication by academic staff. Admas and St Mary's University Colleges in particular had comprehensive research policies and a greater thrust towards research and publication. The research activities of the case study private institutions focus on international and national conferences (multi-disciplinary conferences), monthly seminars at institutional level, and a students' annual national research forum. In all the case study institutions, approval of research proposals passes through a review process at department, faculty and university levels. The main mechanisms used by HEIs to encourage the involvement of academic staff in research entail rewarding best researchers in the form of incentives such as honorariums, academic rank, scholarships and involvement in research workshops. All HEIs disseminate their own research output through the presentation of annual research symposiums, monthly research seminars, journal articles and locally available mass media.

In general, the senate legislation of all case study institutions states that academic staff members are expected to engage (25% of working time) in research. However, the study findings indicate that the involvement of academic staff in research, particularly in public HEIs, was low; expectations were not met, even in private HEIs. The research culture was not well developed in the universities as required. Some of the reasons mentioned by the respondents for the low participation of academic staff in research and publication include absence of adequate incentive systems, the negligible gap between academic ranks (in terms of salary), academic staff overload due to teaching and other administrative activities, absence of adequate research funds and opportunities to present and attend international and national conferences.

6.3.4. Commitment of top managers to the QA system

The commitment of top management of the university can determine the scope and adequacy of its QA system. The study illustrates that commitment of the top managements of public higher education institutions was low. The institutional leaders of Jimma and Hawassa universities expressed their commitment concerning quality management implementation mainly through establishing QA systems, assigning QA directors and QA committees at institutional level and QA coordinators at faculty levels. In preparing the quality assurance

manual (on paper), they only provided the basic conditions for implementing QA systems and the issue of quality was not top institutional priority. In SMUC and AUC, however, the implementation process of quality assurance occurred according to the developed rules and procedures. The internal quality review committee worked according to the specified guidelines and budget for quality activities was assigned separately. Overall, the commitment of top management of public HEIs in implementing QA systems seemed to be low and less adequate than that of private university colleges. In contrast, SMUC and AUC had embarked on comprehensive quality assurance programs to improve the quality of their services. The institutional QA systems seemed to be adequate.

6.3.5. Impact of QA systems

The data gathered through interviews from private university colleges in the case study indicates that EQ audits, accreditation and self-assessment processes had a positive effect on the culture of quality within their institutions because an external body (for accreditation) and internal quality managers put them under pressure to implement the system. The self-assessment fostered teamwork among staff and enhanced staff accountability for the results of the process. More concretely, self-assessment also helped them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and to build capacity from within, improved the teaching and learning, entrenched the concept of quality in the minds of policy makers, quality managers and academic staff, increased the number of publications, and improved the management system of the university college. However, the public case study institutions revealed ambivalent feelings regarding the effects of EQ audits and self-assessment; they could not confidently say that self-assessment had had a positive effect on the quality culture of their institution because regular self-assessment at institutional or faculty level was either not conducted or the actual practice of the QA system was merely symbolic. Of course, they did not hide the contribution of the EQ audit (HERQA); HERQA had provided them with training, QA standards (national standards) and various self-assessment documents. As a result, they had established their own QA systems or QA offices, QA directors at institutional levels, and QA committees at institutional and faculty levels. In their opinion, this was the impact of the national QA assurance agency.

6.3.6. Factors influencing the implementation of QA systems

Both the qualitative (interview) and quantitative (questionnaire) data indicates that the major factors that significantly influenced the internal QA systems of higher education institutions, even though the degree varied from public to private institutions, were the lack of financial resources for internal QA implementation; lack of commitment from institutional leaders; lack of training and experiences in QA; absence of incentives for internal quality reviewers; and the lack of follow-up; and measures on the part of government and the national QA agency. In addition, as indicated in the interviews, low salaries of professionals working at the national QA agency, human capacity (shortage of quality experts) and lack of autonomy of HERQA were some of the major problems observed in the national QA agency.

6.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are important insights that emerged from this study which have particular significance for quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education institutions. The country stands to gain a comprehensive analysis of its QA practices, identifying current challenges and difficulties for policy implementation. Analysis of challenges and difficulties can contribute to better understanding of how to develop more effective QA policies and systems at national and institutional levels in order to strengthen the existing QA practices in the future. This in turn can be used to generate relevant and practical QA models, policies, and quality standards for the national and institutional systems.

This research project is the first of its kind in Ethiopia. The study compares public higher education institutions with private higher education institutions. Hence, the identification of challenges and constraints faced by HEIs, the gap observed between public and private HEIs and the opportunity to explore various approaches provide valuable information for policy-makers, managers of HEIs and practitioners of quality. The outcomes of the study can also create a competitive spirit among public and private higher education institutions. One of the study findings indicates that because of the accreditation system and regular follow-up of the government in the private HEIs that participated in the case study, private university colleges developed and implemented comprehensive QA systems and were committed to quality. This can convince policy-makers the importance of an accreditation system in both public and private HEIs and lead them to devise a follow-up mechanism that can enable

them to minimize the symbolic implementation QA system in public universities. In this sense,

I hope that the study will serve as a useful resource for informed decision-making regarding QA policy and practices.

Another important lesson that can be drawn from this study is that even though comprehensive QA systems were not observed in public higher education institutions, there is a general shift from traditional implicit and common sense practices to explicit quality practices that have clear guidelines, criteria, and articulated procedures. This shift shows a movement in Ethiopian HEIs from the traditional way of looking at quality to greater specification in terms of quality assurance. This trend was observed at all four the case study higher education institutions. Therefore, this study demonstrates to policy-makers and quality managers how the current shift has made quality assurance a more objective and explicit exercise on the basis of which universities can be evaluated.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that external and internal quality assurance systems, at least in the Ethiopian context, will be an inevitable feature of higher education for the foreseeable future, the following recommendations may assist policy makers, national QA agency and institutional leaders to improve their future quality assurance practices.

Developing an external quality assurance system requires creating a model (framework) and formal policy to provide a framework within which HEIs can develop and monitor the effectiveness of their QA systems. Every EQA system needs to develop a quality model that will then be operationalized through the setting of standards and clear guidelines for assessment. Indeed, QA standards can provide detailed information on how institutions will be judged. HERQA has set QA standards (HERQA's ten focus areas) for all higher education institutions. However, the study findings indicate that there was no QA policy and QA model at either national or institutional levels. This will have a negative impact on the implementation of QA systems of higher education institutions. Therefore, MOE, HERQA and HEIs should have a policy , workable QA model , and guiding principle that would provide a

useful reference point for higher education institutions and determine the standards of courses within the national framework.

Admittedly, to work out and implement a quality assurance mechanism requires considerable time and dedication of top managers and academic staff, and must be given due attention. It is also essential that any quality assurance initiative should be fully integrated into the university's operating philosophy, structure, and culture. The commitment of top management of public HEIs to implement QA systems was one of the major problems observed during the study. Addressing the important issues in implementation, namely resources, support from the government and commitment of different units, is indispensable. Universities should take the following steps. First, HEIs should formulate and regularly update plans for the QA processes, procedures, and schedules. Second, the university's top managers, directors, deans, administrative units and QA committees should have a linkage with the institutional QA office. Third, HEIs should assign the necessary and appropriate human and financial resources for QA system implementation. Fourth, reporting on key outcomes of quality improvement should be incorporated into the normal cycle of internal reporting to the university senate council and management council at regular intervals.

Training of top management of HEIs, internal quality reviewers and academic staff should be a continuous process. Top managers, internal quality assessors and academic staff require additional skills for system conceptualization and the development of QA methodologies, and skills for implementation of QA processes. Currently, there is no formal training available in this area at institutional and national levels. The majority of the research respondents, particularly from public universities, mentioned that how to implement a QA system was another major problem they faced in their institutions because they lacked appropriate experience and training. Most of the training was given to top managers of the university and not to internal quality reviewers or academic staff. Therefore, institutional QA reviewers, and academic and administrative staff should be trained by either the national QA agency or institutional QA office at regular intervals. In addition, experience sharing and focusing on providing exposure to other higher education QA processes should be facilitated by each HEI. The national QA agency should also disseminate best practice to higher education institutions.

The curriculum development process is an essential element for assuring the quality of higher education. Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programs. The confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities that ensure that programs are well designed, regularly monitored and periodically revised, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency. Regular feedback from employers, alumni, and students, and formal program approval procedures by a body other than those teaching the program are essential. To solve the problems observed during the study, i.e. the absence of periodic review of courses, regular feedback from stakeholders, and involvement of external stakeholders during curriculum approval, particularly in public HEIs, higher education institutions should establish rules and procedures for periodic review of courses. This should convince and encourage academic staff to review their courses at regular intervals to maintain their relevance. In addition, HEIs need to conduct tracer studies to get feedback on the appropriateness of the skills that the graduates receive in the university.

Quality assurance processes that contain recommendations for action or require a subsequent action plan should have a predetermined follow-up procedure that is implemented consistently. Quality assurance is not principally about an individual external scrutiny event: it should be about continuously trying to do a better job. The National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) should not end with the recommendation and publication of the self-assessment report. It should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with specifically and further enhancement should be encouraged.

The findings of this study suggest that the absence of national and institutional quality policies played a strong impeding role in policy implementation at many higher education institutions. The absence of a national education quality assurance policy framework and a stable and well-developed institutional quality assurance system slows down the implementation of QA systems, particularly in the public institutions involved in this case study. However, since the two private case study institutions were supported by external

consultants at the beginning (when they established their QA systems), they have a well-established QA system; the whole implementation process was adequate. The implementation of quality mechanisms could be accelerated if external consultants facilitated the process in public higher education institutions.

All case study institutions have put in place a number of mechanisms in order to enhance research and boost the staff research capacity. It was evident that the case study institutions had invested significant resources for research activities and provided research funds. However, due to a number of constraints their research output was low and did not meet the expectations as stated in the legislation of the institutions. Therefore, institutions should strengthen the relationship between the institutional QA office and research and development office to enhance the output and quality of research, involve academic staff in different research workshops (international and national), increase the commitment of senior management towards research, and increase the salary gaps of academic ranks.

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Web Resources

Australian Accreditation Council (AAC): http://www.auscouncil.com/index.php

Asia Pacific QualityNetwork (APQN): http://www.apqn.org/

Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA): http://www.teqsa.gov.au/

Central and Eastern European Quality Network: http://www.ceenetwork.hu/

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), USA: www.chea.org

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA): http://www.herqa.edu.et/

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE): http://www.inqaahe.org/

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): www.qaa.ac.uk

APPENDICES

Annexure A: **Questionnaire for Faculty quality assurance coordinators, Department/program heads and senior academic staff of all sample universities**

Annexure B: **Interview Guide - for university Academic V/ presidents, quality assurance directors, Research and publication directors and Faculty Deans of all sample universities**

Annexure C: **INTERVIEW GUIDELIN FOR NATIONAL QA AGENCY EXPERTS**

Annexure D: **INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

Annexure E: **PARTICIPANTS OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Questionnaire for Faculty quality assurance coordinators, Department/program heads and senior academic staff of all sample universities

Research Title: Quality Assurance practices in Ethiopian public and private higher education institutions

WOLLEGA UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF PEDAGOGICAL SCIENCE

My name is Kebede Nemomsa and I am a Ph.D. student in Wollegn University's Pedagogical Science Department. I am doing my research on quality assurance practices in selected public and private higher education institutions in Ethiopia. I would like to request your participation in the study.

This questionnaire was targeted at Faculty quality assurance coordinators, Department heads and senior academic staff to collect data that can be used purely for my Ph.D. study purposes. Your responses will therefore be treated with highest confidentiality. The respondents are kindly requested to respond to all questions and as honestly as in any way possible in order to enable the researcher to draw the most accurate conclusions on quality assurance issues in higher education institutions. The survey will also be followed up by interviews and document analysis that will include respondents other than those targeted by this instrument.

Thank you for participating in the study.

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. **Name of the institution** ----------

2. **Year of foundation**: ----------

3. Who is the owner of the institution? □ State □ Private (person)

4. Which is the highest level to which your institution educates students? □ Bachelor

□ Masters □ Doctorate

5. What is the name of your faculty/College/ School? (Tick in the appropriate circle below)

1	College /Faculty of Agriculture	O
2	College /Faculty of N. Science	O
3	College /Faculty of Education	O
4	College /Faculty of Engineering and Technology	O
5	College /Faculty of Law	O
6	College /Faculty of Social Science	O
7	College /Faculty of Business and Economics	O
8	College /Faculty of Health Science	O
9	Others ----------	O

6. Please indicate your gender by ticking in the relevant box. Male ☐ Female ☐

7. Indicate your higher academic qualifications/position by ticking in the relevant circle below.

1	Assistant Lecturer	O
2	MA /MSC / Lecturer	O
3	Doctoral degree (Ph D)	O
4	Medical Doctor (MD)	O
5	Associate professor /assistant professor	O
5	Professor	O
6	Other (please specify)----------	O

8. What position do you hold in the university?

1	Faculty quality assurance coordinator	O
2	Department head / program leader	O
3	Senior lecturer	O
4	Other (specify)----------	O

B. Institutional QA practices

1. Do you have an institutional quality assurance system? □ yes □ no.

If your answer is 'yes', when did your institution start introducing a quality assurance system? □ before 1999 □ In 2000 □ in 2001 □ In 2002 □ in 2003 □ Not yet

2. When was the institutional quality assurance manual developed? □ before 1999 □ in 2000 □ in 2001 □ In 2003 □ In 2004 □ Not yet

3. Which activities does your institutional quality assurance process cover? Select and rank three of your core duties in your current job. (1 denoting the most important and 3 the least important)

NO	ACTIVITIES	1	2	3
1	Teaching and learning	O	O	O
2	Research and publication	O	O	O
3	Student assessment system	O	O	O
4	Student support system	O	O	O
5	Curriculum design and revision	O	O	O

4. How does the process for designing curriculum and programs work within your institution? Please choose all applicable options.

Program leader / department head prepares the curriculum after which staff members may Comment the draft. ☐
Working groups / committee established by the faculty/ department prepare the curriculum and propose for the department / faculty. ☐
Each staff member proposes what they find essential for the program. ☐
The curriculum is designed by the ministry or other essential body and implemented by the Staff. ☐

5. What kind of process do you have in place in monitoring the existing curricula?

Please choose all applicable options.

the curriculum are evaluated on a regular basis /every year ☐

the curriculum/programs are evaluated as part of an external accreditation (HERQA). ☐

the curriculum is evaluated on an informal level (discussion between staff member and Students). ☐

the curricula are sometimes evaluated after students complete one program. ☐

the curricula or programs are evaluated occasionally based on the interest of the instructors. ☐

6. What are the major activities used by your institution to ensure the quality of teaching and learning? Select and rank three of your core activities. (1 denoting the most important) and 3 the least important)

NO	ACTIVITIES	YES	NO
1	learner-centred teaching approach	O	O
2	continuous assessment	O	O
3	student counselling and support system	O	O
4	Practical experience of learners	O	O

7. Which of the following processes does your institution have in place in order to ensure the quality of research activities? Please choose all applicable options.

Internal seminars where research proposal, findings and ideas are presented ☐

Internal peer review of research project ☐

Eternal peer review (inviting external peers) ☐

Key performance indicators defined for each research activity ☐

8. How do you think the following factors hindered the implementation of quality assurance system?

1 2 3

Very serious Rather serious Not serious

N0.	FACTORS			
		1	2	3
1	Lack of commitment of institutional leaders	O	O	O
2	lack of finance for internal QA	O	O	O
3	Lack of appropriate training and experience on QA	O	O	O
4	lack of follow-up on the parts of the government	O	O	O
5	Lack of incentives for quality reviewers	O	O	O

6	Others ----------	O	O	O

Other remarks, suggestions

.....

Thank you for your cooperation!

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide - for university Academic V/ presidents, quality assurance directors, Research and publication directors and Faculty Deans of all sample universities

Research Title: Quality Assurance practices in Ethiopian public and private higher education institutions

What did the institution do regarding the internal and external quality assurance implementation?

Who initiates it and who is responsible for undertaking the quality review in your university?

How do you assure the quality of education in your institution, if there is no quality assurance mechanism in your institution and faculty?

What are the practices performed by your institution regarding assuring quality in:

Curriculum development and revision process ?

Teaching and learning?

Student assessment ?

Research and publication ?

Who develops the institutional manual on quality assurance in your institution?

Was your university represented in national quality assurance development? How about the participation of university lecturers in institutional quality assurance policy development?

Is the university required to make any form of reporting (regarding quality assurance) to the (1) Ministry of Education and (2) National Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA)?

What kind of structure do you have in place to support internal quality assurance?

What guide /bench-marking is used in the university to evaluate the educational quality of the institution? What are the quality criteria used by the institution/ programs?

What do you think about the role and responsibilities of institutional QAO in

Clearly identified and defined duties and roles of the quality assurance office?

Enhancing the implementation of internal QA systems?

Providing overall strategic direction on QA ?

Establishing plans for QA implementation?

Completing quality assessment activity and reporting on the finished work to the university and HERQA?

Participating on QA conferences?

Identifying the critical success factors?

How is staff involved in developing quality assurance practices in the university?

What type of QA model does your institution/ faculty use to evaluate the quality of education? Why?

Are there any collaborative linkages the university has with :

National QA agencies ?

International QA agencies ?

What is the commitment of senior leadership, department heads and faculty deans to continuous quality improvement in your university?

Having QA structure (establishment of quality committee)

Assurance of appropriate resources (financial and human)

Assignment of full time staff (QA leaders & QA committees, QA reviewers)

Are there adequate trained and experienced professionals (quality reviewer) for effective review and implementation of QA systems in your institution now? For the future?

Is there an institutional / faculty research and publication policy that encourages staff in your institution and faculty? What about dissemination policy?

Please comment on the following topics.

When do staff members conduct research?

Promotion of staff members engaged on research

Encouraging and monitoring research activities through faculty research committee

Effective incentive system for academic staff who are engaged in research

Engagement in Consultancy service

What do you think of the gap between the research QA policy and practices on the ground?

How many publications has the institution/ faculty/ department realized annually?

Do you believe that the institutional QA system is related to what is happening on the ground?

What is the perception of leaders towards current practices of internal and external QA policy and systems?

Is there a regular budget assigned for the work of quality assurance in your institution?

Government support

Support from External organization

Internal revenue

Do you think that the absence of a budget for the internal QA system has a negative impact on the implementation of an effective quality assurance system ?

What support are HERQA and MOE providing for your institution?

Training for HEIs, quality reviewers

in policy formulation

Follow up by the agency

What do you think is the impact of external and internal QA systems on teaching-learning research and publication, institutional management, students' assessments and curriculum? Is relevant information on institutional and program quality given to stakeholders?

In what ways can existing quality assurance practices be improved to enhance a sustainable Quality culture?

What are those factors that hinder the implementation of effective quality assurance systems in your institution?

Finally, do you have any suggestions as to how quality should be improved in your school/Faculty/ or in the university as a whole?

END OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW GUIDELIN FOR NATIONAL QA AGENCY EXPERTS

Research Title: Quality Assurance practices in Ethiopian public and private higher education institutions

What are the appropriate policies to be undertaken or envisaged by the HERQA and MOE for assuring the quality of higher education?

What is the official position of government on quality assurance system in HEIs?

Does the university make any form of reporting (regarding quality assurance) to HERQA /When?

Who is responsible for undertaking the external review at national level (private and public)?

What is the commitment of top managers of the university to implement the current QA system in both private and public HEIs?

Why are private HEIs alone subject to accreditation?

Why are professional organizations in quality evaluation absent in the country?

What type of models do institutions use to evaluate the quality of their education?

What do you think is the impact of external QA systems on the quality of HEIs?

Do you think that HERQA discharged their role and responsibilities in ensuring and maintaining quality of HEIs?

Do you believe that the national QA policy is related to what is happening on the ground ?

What kind of support are HERQA and MOE providing for HEIs in the country (Public and private) ?

In terms of providing training for HEIs, quality reviewers

Follow up by the agency and actions taken

In providing professional support

Are there adequate human and financial resources for QA systems nationally and institutionally now? For the future ?

Is corrective action taken to remedy deficiencies identified by the external review?

What is the role of EQUIP and other non-government organizations in supporting QA System in HEIs?

Do you inform the public about the results of external evaluation carried out by HERQA?

What do you think about the factors hindering the implementation of effective quality assurance policies and systems in HEIs and HERQA?

In what ways can existing quality assurance practices be improved to enhance sustainable quality?

Finally, do you have any suggestions as to how quality should be improved in higher education institutions?

END OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

INSTITUTION	PARTICIPANTS
HERQA(National QA Agency)	
	1Vice director of HERQA
	2 Senior experts of HERQA
Jimma University	
	1 Academic V/ P
	1 University QA Director
	1 University R & P Director
	4 Faculty Deans
St Mary's University College	
	1 Academic V/ P
	1 Academic programs Director
	1 University QA Director
	1 University R & P Director
	3 Faculty Deans
Admas University College	
	1 Academic V/ P
	1 Academic programs Director
	1 University QA Director
	1 University R & P Director
	4 Faculty Deans
Hawassa University	
	1 QA director
	1 Academic programs Director
	4 Faculty Deans
	1 University R & P Director
TOTAL	31 participants

PARTICIPANTS OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTITUTION	PARTICIPANTS	
Jimma University		
	10 Department/ program head	
	13 Senior instructors	
	4 Faculty QA coordinators	
St.Mary University college		
	8 Department/ program head	
	10 Senior instructors	
	3 Faculty Q A coordinators	
A dmas University College		
	8 Department/ program head	
	10 Senior instructors	
	3 Faculty Q A coordinators	
Hawassa University		
	10 Department/ program head	
	12 senior instructors	
	4 faculty Q A coordinators	
TOTAL	*94 participants*	

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ቁጥር /Ref./ WU/VS/299/KL-7/2011

ቀን /Date/ 07-11-2011

To: _____ University

Subject: **Request for Benefaction**

Kebede Nemomsa is an academic staff of Wollega University. He is attending his doctoral studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Currently he planned to conduct his dissertation entitled as "Quality Assurance policy and practices in Ethiopian public and private higher Education institutions." Here, we request your institution to render him the necessary support and we would like to appreciate for your cooperation in advance.

With best regards

ደሳለኝ ቡልቻ
Delessa Bulcha
Quality Assurance Business & Development Vice President

CC.

To: Academic V/president office

To: Research and publication Directorate office

WU

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Wollega University
Academic Vice President Office

ቁ/PC/Ref No. ዩኒ27,878/ክሥ-7/12
ቀን/Date. 18-01-2012

To: ADMAS ---------- University

From: Wollega University

Subject: Letter of Benefaction

Mr. Kebede Nemomsa Saketa is an academic staff member of the Faculty of Education in Wollega University. He is doing his PhD at UNISA. His dissertation is entitled "Quality Assurance Policy and Practices in Ethiopian Public & Private Higher Education Institutions'

Accorcingly, we request your cooperation in facilitating conditions by which Mr. Kebede can get pertinent data for his study from your institution.

With regards,

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Academic Vice president

C.C

- President Office
- Faculty of Education
- Mr. Kebede Nemomsa Saketa
  Wollega University

For cooperation

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Wollega University
Academic Vice President Office

ቁ/Ref.No. WU27,878/ኢ.ት-7/12
ቀን/Date. 18-01-2012

To: Hawassa ---------- **University**

From: Wollega University

Subject: Letter of Benefaction

Mr. Kebede Nemomsa Saketa is an academic staff member of the Faculty of Education in Wollega University. He is doing his PhD at UNISA. His dissertation is entitled "Quality Assurance Policy and Practices in Ethiopian Public & Private Higher Education Institutions".

Accordingly, we request your cooperation in facilitating conditions by which Mr. Kebede can get pertinent data for his study from your institution.

With regards,

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education Wollega University

ዶ/ር ኢብሳ ጫላ
Ebsa Bijena (Dr.)
የአካዳሚክ ምክትል ፕሬዝዳንት
Academic Vice president

C.C

- President Office
- Faculty of Education
- Mr. Kebede Nemomsa Saketa
  Wollega University

To Colleges - Graduate Studies - College

To - Colleges
Please provide the necessary information for his research
Thanks
23/01/13

QAD
plse provide the required information for the researcher
Thanks
23/01/13

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